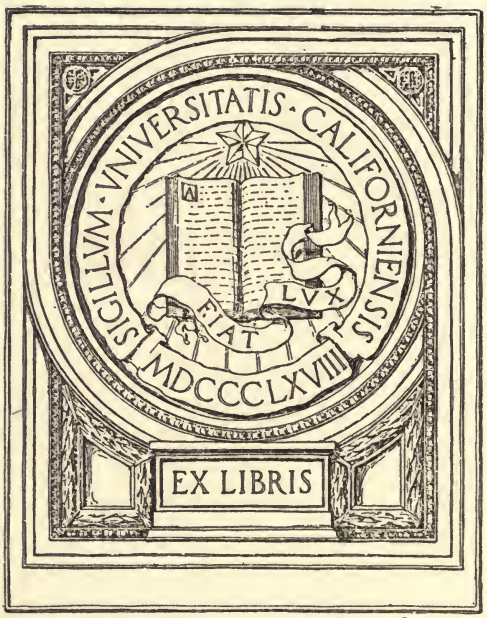
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NATASHA

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THE STORY OF A RUSSIAN WOMAN

BY

ANNA BRODSKY

LONDON

J. M. DENT & SONS LTD.

29 AND 30 BEDFORD STREET

1910

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

IN MEMORY

OF

MY DEAR FRIEND

MISS JULIA GASKELL

447016

PREFACE

I should like to thank two of my English friends, Miss Lilian Winstanly and Miss Gertrude Gregson, for the assistance which they have kindly rendered in regard to this book by helping me with its grammar and English style, in which, as a foreigner, I still feel some difficulty. For any defects which remain I ask the indulgence of my readers.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

NATASHA

CHAPTER I

"HEAVENLY Father! Source of light and truth and love, hear me—thy child. Help me in my unbelief: enlighten my wandering mind with the unfailing light of truth. Kindle this cold heart of mine with strong, pure love for my fellow-men. I ardently desire to be as Thou wouldst have me, but I feel so weak. Do not desert me either in sorrow or joy. And, gracious God, bless my father and mother, and my dear sister Natasha, and all my brothers."

Murmuring this improvised prayer, Tanya knelt on the bare floor of her room. It was a tiny room with whitewashed walls and ceiling. Her elbows rested on the seat of a low chair, and she hid her face in her hands. The sun poured through the windows and lit up with a golden light the kneeling figure of the girl. The silence was only broken by the buzzing of flies on the windows and ceiling.

Outside the South Russian spring bloomed in all its beauty. Suddenly, a low hum was added to the high-pitched note of the flies, a hum which Tanya's quick ear did not fail to catch; she was afraid of being stung by the wasp (she had a constitutional antipathy to all insects), and she sprang up and opened the window to let it out. She saw coming along the road an ox-cart

laden with hay. The driver followed leisurely in his shabby caftan and still wearing his winter cap. Meeting Tanya's glance, he lifted his cap and scratched the back of his head. Tanya recognised Ivan, one of her father's labourers and among the poorest in the village. She would have liked to say a few kind words to him but could not.

"I never find suitable words when I wish to speak to Ivan or his kind," she thought. "I always feel as if I were guilty, and as if they had something serious to reproach me with. I am afraid we never can really be friends with these people; it seems as if something always stood between."

Tanya had heard all about Ivan's troubles from his young daughter—Leesa—whom she often saw weeding in the orchard behind the house; with her she felt no shyness.

Ivan disappeared at the turning of the road, and the only trace that remained of cart and driver was a cloud of dust, which dispersed after a few moments.

Tanya remained standing at the window. Her eyes rested dreamily on the vast smooth surface of the river Boug, which reflected the sun's rays. A light breeze blew across the water to her face.

Her attention was attracted by a noise coming from beyond the thatched roof of the kitchen—a separate building close by. A stork flew towards his clumsy nest on the gable, stretching out his long legs and carrying a serpent in his yellow beak. Seeing his approach, his mate, brooding on her eggs, welcomed him by beating with her wings and clapping loudly with

her beak. Tanya was fond of her neighbours—the stork family—and watched with interest the fluttering that went on for some time in the nest.

"How happy they are—those two," she thought with delight. "Why should not every one be happy on such a day as this?"

"Tatyana Lvòvna, dinner is served," said Dasha, suddenly opening the door and disappearing again as suddenly. Poor Dasha was out of breath: it was no easy task to summon all the members of the Orloff family and their guests; she had to pass from room to room in the main building; then, leaving the front garden, she went into the three separate outbuildings at the back, but found most of the rooms empty on account of the fine weather; then she ran to the river, where she discovered some of the younger guests; she crossed a narrow bridge leading to the bathing-house —a favourite spot for anglers; here she found Tanya's younger brother and his friend—they were absorbed in their fishing and annoyed with Dasha for making such a noise as she passed. But, continuing her search, she proceeded to the back yard, then to the stables, and finally to the big orchard behind the house.

Five o'clock was the dinner-hour in Pokròvskoe, but in spring and summer very few of the young people remembered it, lost as they were in the attractions of an outdoor life. They found it a nuisance to sit at a meal which lasted over an hour.

Tanya had to cross the front garden on the way to the main part of the building inhabited by her parents and the elder members of the family. She and her

sister, Natasha, lived in one of the outhouses—a privilege accorded to them after many entreaties on the part of Natasha, who always knew exactly what she wanted and generally contrived to get it.

On entering the spacious room, Tanya saw to her great relief that two chairs besides her own were still empty. As she was passing, her mother said, "Wherever have you been? Your hair is as rough as if you had just got out of bed."

"She has been writing a philosophical essay," said Nicolas.

"Or some political speeches," added George. Both brothers were fond of Tanya, but they never missed an opportunity of teasing. Tanya blushed to the roots of her hair, and stood a moment uncertain whether to return to her room and tidy herself or to sit down; but finally she sat down without uttering a syllable, for she could not find the right words. The consciousness of having blushed made her more uncomfortable still. She did not mind the teasing of her brothers, but to have displeased her mother was another thing: that distressed her terribly. She mechanically stirred her soup, which had already grown cold, and did not raise her eyes.

At breakfast, luncheon, and tea every one sat where he or she pleased, but at dinner the members of Orloff's family had their regular places. At one end of the table, surrounded by the more important guests, sat the father — Lev. Baltazàrovitch Orloff — owner of Pokròvskoe. He was a tall, strongly-built man over forty, whose whole appearance spoke of an active, out-

door life. He had a frank countenance with prominent forehead; large, clear, brown eyes expressing a kindly, candid nature, and he was attractive at the very first glance.

Opposite, at the other end of the table, sat his wife—Seraphìma Petròvna Orlòva—a tall, slender, finely-built figure; she wore a simple grey dress with a white linen collar round her neck, but she looked thoroughly distinguished. Her oval face, of a beautiful, ivory-like pallor, appeared young and girlish, and formed a remarkable contrast with her snow-white hair, which was gathered in a simple knot behind. She could not be called beautiful, for her features were somewhat indefinite and irregular, but her eyes were remarkable —sometimes steel-grey and sometimes violet, and again, owing to the dilation of the pupils, they seemed black. The expression of her eyes, as well as her quiet, composed manner, bespoke a serious and thoughtful nature.

The space between her and her husband was occupied on the one side by the boys and their friends; on the other by the girls and their friends. The latter group included their cousin Sònya—a plain girl, fair and anæmic; she was an orphan, and a permanent inhabitant of one of the buildings of the Pokròvskoe house. It was difficult to define her age: she had a tired, faded look.

As the third course was being served, Natasha entered the room, followed by her little brother, Urik, and Pilad—a beautiful white pointer—a great favourite with every one, especially the children. Of this Pilad

was well aware, and made the round of the table, begging scraps from his friends.

" We will not take any soup—just what you are having now," Natasha said, approaching her mother, and placing by her plate a large bunch of wild violets—her favourite flower. " If you only knew, darling mother, what the Dotoff garden is like to-day! All the cherry trees are in blossom and so many violets! I have never seen so many! "

Natasha's sunburnt face was so happy, and her expression so affectionate, that her mother's intended reproof died on her lips.

" You must eat your dinner properly! " she said.

The most casual glance at Natasha showed her to be Orloff's daughter. She had the same large brown eyes, the same finely-arched brows, the same frank open look, and a beautiful mouth which could laugh heartily. Natasha took her seat beside Tanya's and swallowed her food quickly to make up for lost time. The two sisters, so unlike in appearance, so different in temperament, loved each other dearly, and had been from childhood the best of friends. Natasha, the elder by two years, was already eighteen. Quick-tempered and at times self-willed, she carried with her wherever she went an atmosphere of joy and merriment which endeared her to every one, not excepting the servants, who were one and all devoted to their young mistress — Natàlya Lvòvna. This liveliness often caused her to be taken for the younger of the two, for Tanya, with her grave thoughtful eyes, had a more staid demeanour. She gazed admiringly at her

sister, whom she regarded not only as a beauty but as the personification of all possible gifts and talents. It seemed only right and natural to Tanya that her sister should meet with success and admiration wherever she went. Being herself of a somewhat timid nature, she greatly admired her sister's confidence, and often asked her advice and help. But in spite of this tender admiration, she could not repress occasional qualms of jealousy when she saw her mother and sister together. And though Seraphìma Petròvna was fond of all her children, she could not help feeling a certain preference for her brilliant Natasha. Seraphìma Petròvna herself had lost her mother when quite a child, and had been brought up by a rich maiden aunt. This aunt had feared to take the whole responsibility on herself, and had obtained the help of an English governess. The two elderly ladies wished to make a model woman of Seraphìma, but did not realise the wants and necessities of a child's nature. Free exercise in the open air was not allowed, and Seraphìma had no girl companions. Shut up as she generally was with her books in the large luxurious house of her aristocratic aunt—who was, on principle, very strict—the child grew up reserved and learnt to hide her feelings. Contrary to her aunt's wish, she made a love match with Orloff. She was devoted to him, and yet her children never saw her give him any caress or betray her affection in any special manner. Natasha was the only person who ever called forth a show of feeling from Seraphìma Petròvna. Tanya never dared to embrace her mother or to kiss her lips as Natasha

often did. The only caress Tanya ever received was a kiss when her mother gave her her blessing in saying "Good-night." But even this kiss was more like a grave ceremony than a caress, and was received by the child with deep reverence. Tanya stood silent before her mother, following with her eyes the little hand, its thumb and two first fingers joined together, which touched her brow, passed to her breast, then to her right shoulder and then to her left, whilst her mother whispered, "In the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen." If her father happened to be at home, she would receive a similar benediction from him. Orloff performed this sacred duty with a deep paternal affection. Tanya would look at her father's kind face, half-closed eyes, and serious expression, and go to bed in the happy assurance that all harm would be kept from her during the night. Tanya adored her father, and never felt nervous or shy in his presence, but she saw little of him and seldom found him alone. Lev. Baltazàrovitch had many duties: he owned a large estate, he was representative for the nobles in the province of Kherson, and in this capacity had occasionally to visit St. Petersburg and have audience with the Czar. When Tanya got the chance, she loved to surprise her father and come upon him unawares when he was alone in his study. She would approach his arm-chair on tiptoe and, covering his eyes with her hands, would kiss the crown of his head where the hair was beginning to grow thin. He would try to remove the slender little hands, and failing, would sing in a mocking voice—

" Disappointed little miss!
For whom didst bring that tender kiss? "

At this Tanya would remove her hands, and stepping before him give him an offended reproachful glance. But he would pretend not to notice her expression and, with refined cruelty, continue—

" Tanya looks for one to meet her:
Is it Ivan? Is it Peter?
Does it not offend her rather
When she only finds her father? "

Tanya would try in vain to keep a grave face and an offended manner, but when she saw his dear shoulders shaking with laughter, and tears of amusement rolling down his wrinkled cheeks, she would spring to his knee and give him a fervent hug.

The lengthy meal was nearly over, when suddenly the pointer pricked up his ears, and the children were startled by the sound of a carriage approaching. Every one looked up and saw a droshky drawn by two horses enter the gate. Urik was the first to recognise in the occupant of the carriage Professor Tenkòvsky. Next moment, all Orloff's boys and girls, including Tanya, were on their feet, throwing down their napkins and stumbling over the chairs in their way. They rushed to welcome the dear guest, some to the window, others to the door. Even their mother's endeavour to check their enthusiasm proved of no avail. On entering the room, Tenkòvsky was greeted by a chorus of delighted voices. Obviously touched by the hearty reception, to which, however, he was accustomed in Pokròvskoe, he passed from one to the other, saying a

kind word to each, shaking hands with the elder and kissing the children, who all wanted to carry his bag to his room, or be useful in some way or other.

Tenkòvsky had already dined, and the company passed at once on to the terrace through a door leading from the dining-room. On the terrace, under the shade of willows and acacias, it was cool even during the hottest part of the day. A delicious scent of flowers greeted the party. The river gleamed in the clear air, and the white lilac and spring roses bordering the road which led to it shone in their full beauty. The church and convent, situated miles away on the opposite side of the river, seemed quite near. The long-drawn-out sounds of the vesper bell came at regular intervals across the water, and added to the peace of the scene.

"This is a real Paradise! What a change after dusty Odessa!" said Tenkòvsky, looking round with delight as he took his seat.

"Do stay with us!" exclaimed several of the children.

"I wish I could," answered Tenkòvsky, smiling at his little friends, "but what will the students say if I miss my lectures?"

Tenkòvsky was a professor at the University of Odessa, and during the session could not be absent for more than a day or two. He was an eminent scientist, known in his own country as well as abroad for his works on botany and zoology. He was a man of imposing personality: his tall and well-built figure showed elegance and refinement. His mother had been a Russian and his father a Pole. Notwithstanding his threescore years, his face had something in it childlike and pure—

the result of his disinterested and lifelong devotion to the cause of knowledge. He loved to come to Pokròvskoe, not only because he was glad to see his old schoolfellow, Orloff, and his family, but because he was pursuing interesting work there. For a year he had been engaged in research in connection with the Siberian plague, which was destroying thousands of sheep—a terrible calamity for the rural inhabitants of South Russia. Orloff was naturally interested in Tenkòvsky's work, and had built a laboratory for him on the estate; he also entertained Tenkòvsky's demonstrator for months together, and put at his friend's disposal the sheep he required to inoculate for his experiments.

CHAPTER II

TENKÒVSKY had not been half an hour on the terrace before he suggested going to the laboratory. He was eager to see what had been done in his absence, and proceeded there with his friend and the two girls. The laboratory was a mile away, and the road led through the orchard, which was surrounded by a ditch or moat, crossed by a narrow plank. The laboratory had originally been a gardener's cottage. It was a small white building with a thatched roof, and four square windows looking on to the meadows. The windows stood wide open, and so did the narrow wooden door, and on the threshold stood Ivàn Óssipovitch Milyùtine, shading his eyes from the sun with his broad hand. He was Tenkòvsky's demonstrator, and had formerly been his pupil. Milyùtine was a man of the peasant class, a native of Little Russia, who had worked his way to his present position. He was about thirty, and was strongly built, broad shouldered and broad chested. He was dressed in a wide Russian blouse, made of linen, and embroidered with red cotton on the yoke and round the tight stand-up collar; the blouse was buttoned down one side, and fastened loosely by a narrow leather belt. He had a somewhat defiant air, due to his habit of suddenly throwing back his head with a little jerk to clear his long chestnut hair out of his eyes. He was in reality, however, of a most gentle, frank, and

idealistic nature, as is frequently the case with men of great physical strength, and Milyùtine had, from his childhood, been the protector of everything weak, whether animal or child. A great advocate for women's rights, he was deeply interested in all social questions, and, although rather silent when in society, he could get into a fury of excitement when narrow or prejudiced views were expressed in his presence on the subjects he had most at heart. Owing to these outbursts of enthusiasm, Tenkòvsky had nicknamed him *enfant terrible.* When as head boy he had completed his studies at the district school in a village not far from Kieff, he entered the Agricultural College, and, as his thirst for knowledge was by no means satisfied, he won his way to the Faculty of Science in the University of Odessa. He suffered many privations, even hunger, and Professor Tenkòvsky was struck with Milyùtine's ardour and industry, and assisted him both morally and materially. Milyùtine was deeply devoted to his instructor and benefactor.

Milyùtine met Tenkòvsky with a broad smile, showing two rows of large white teeth; he had no words ready, but he shook the professor's hand vigorously and conducted him to the laboratory. Only here did he feel himself in his element! His tongue was loosened, and he gave an eloquent and detailed account of all the worked performed since Tenkòvsky's last visit. By degrees, the men grew completely absorbed in their conversation.

The table in the centre of the room was loaded with bottles containing chemicals, test tubes, filters, open

note books, and other scientific appliances. In one corner of the room was a tub fitted with water pipes, and on a nail in the wall hung towels and an apron. This was Natasha's corner. She put on her apron, filled the tub, and began to wash the glass apparatus, listening eagerly to every word that was spoken by the group at the table. She took a deep interest in all work done in the laboratory, and was in the habit of assisting Milyùtine daily, her part being to wash the test tubes, make a solution or filtration, or anything else in her power. Milyùtine admired Natasha's energy and intelligence, and was always ready to enlighten her as far as he could. He explained the preparation of vaccine, and showed her how to apply it to the vaccination of the sheep in the fields, so that she had become familiar with the whole process.

Milyùtine's report met with Tenkòvsky's full approval, and Natasha was greatly pleased.

Tanya stood at her sister's side for some minutes, looking on indifferently, then went into the fresh air, glad to escape from the close atmosphere of the laboratory.

The meadows were one mass of flowers—tulips red and yellow, irises, and other field flowers were peeping here and there amid the waving blades of grass. The air was fragrant with the scent of blossoms and herbs, and myriads of birds were singing Tanya listened to the rhythmical call of the quails in the grass; then she walked slowly and carefully, scarcely touching the ground with her feet, afraid of frightening the birds or spoiling the perfect harmony around her. The peace

and beauty filled her heart with joy. She stopped to gaze at a lark soaring high above, singing his joyous song, and she heard the cuckoo across the orchard calling to his mate. A yellowhammer was singing somewhere near, and from the bank of a small stream that wound through the meadows came the broken notes of a nightingale.

Tanya wandered on till she reached the stream, which looked like a golden ribbon in the sunset, with its rich border of buttercups and hazel bushes. She longed to give some expression to her delight. Feeling sure the nightingale must be somewhere near in the bush, Tanya lay down on the grass, keeping quite still and motionless. She soon heard the unmistakable familiar note, and saw a modest-looking little grey bird sitting on a bough with its eyes shut. The notes came, one by one, slowly at first, then following each other faster and faster, till the modulations and variations grew into trills, more and more passionate. The little bird's breast throbbed as he sang. Tanya had never been so close to a nightingale before, and scarcely dared to breathe. The song was full of meaning to her; it spoke of a love she had not yet experienced, but which she felt real and a part of her own nature, a love embracing at once the greatest joy and the greatest sorrow. She listened and listened, a new world opening before her. But what of the happy present? What of Natasha and all those she loved? The wonderful bird seemed to sing of separation and change, but she dearly loved her life as it was.

The marvellous song was over, the bird had gone,

but Tanya still lay on the grass, her hands tightly clasped as if in prayer. She wondered what the future had in store for her and for those she loved. But, whatever might be hidden in the coming years, she felt there must come a time when the struggles and separations so inevitable in this life would be over, and in her firm belief in this happy issue she almost wished to die.

The sun sank below the horizon, leaving its glow on the cloudless sky, and a cool west wind sprang up and swept across the meadows. A free and restful feeling pervaded the boundless space. Tanya did not know how long she had been lying in the grass, but felt it was time to return home. It was already dark when she entered the dining-room. A large lamp with an opal shade shed a pleasant glow. A shining brass samovar of imposing dimensions adorned one end of the table, and gave it a cheerful aspect. Its high-pitched notes, so dear to the heart of every Russian, gave Tanya a feeling of home. The half-empty milk and cream jugs, tea glasses, and cups left on the white tablecloth showed that most of the family had already taken tea. Merry voices came through the open door leading to the terrace. Her father and mother and two elder brothers were busy entertaining more newly-arrived guests. Sònya, whose week it was to superintend the tea-table, was still sitting by the samovar; her usually pale cheeks had a little colour, and she looked happy. Tenkòvsky sat at her side chatting in his kind considerate way. No one, as a rule, cared much to talk to Sònya; to the majority she seemed

lifeless and uninteresting, but it was not so with Tenkòvsky. One of the chief beauties of his character was his gift for discovering the best in every one, without respect to age or rank or nationality. In his presence every one gained self-respect and showed his or her best self. This was the key which opened all hearts to him. His voice, and the expression of his large dark eyes with their bushy brows, spoke of a warm-hearted, genial nature which endeared him to all who knew him.

Encouraged by Tenkòvsky's attention, Sònya asked him questions about the book she was reading. Natasha and Milyùtine sat on the other side of Sònya, listening sympathetically. Natasha, who always took Sònya's part, was pleased with the attention paid her by the dear old man, and looked at him with love and admiration. When Tanya joined the little group at her sister's side, she heard her say, " We were waiting for you, Tanya. Lev. Semènovitch (Tenkòvsky's name) has brought Schiller's poems to read to us; isn't it good of him? "

Tanya was delighted. During his last visit to Pokròvskoe he had spoken to the girls about Schiller's poems, and been astonished to find that, though well acquainted with the German language, which they spoke quite fluently, they were ignorant of Schiller, and seemed to doubt if any poetry could impress them as much as beautiful prose. Tenkòvsky tried to show them they were wrong, and promised, as a proof, to bring them Schiller's works. He now produced a small red volume from his pocket and began to read " Die Worte des Glaubens." A half-empty glass of tea was standing

by his side, and in his fingers he had a lighted cigarette. He read in a simple, impressive manner, looking at times from over the book at the little group of listeners who hung on his lips. This sympathetic attention impressed him; he passed from one poem to another, choosing those which were deeper and more interesting as his audience grew more and more enthusiastic. At last he said, "And now listen to a great favourite of mine!" The little book was not needed, for he recited "Die Ideale" by heart. He began in a low, deep voice, which, as he proceeded, grew ardent and sad, full of meaning.

The poem spoke of all the disappointments which meet a man as he proceeds in life, and described him as arriving at the end with no consolation but friendship. Tenkòvsky's voice expressed deep sorrow when he came to the last words, and perfect silence followed. The listeners were so much moved that they could not speak. Natasha struggled with her tears, which choked her. Her sensitive, generous heart made her understand fully the meaning of the poem, and she knew its application; she knew that the eminent man before her had devoted all his life and strength, all the best in him, to the service of science and the teaching of others; now, when over sixty, he was a lonely man, with nobody to care for his broken health or to console him in troubles. He had had no time to enjoy life in his younger days, and now, when he felt old age approaching, he was unable to give himself the rest and comfort he deserved. Natasha fully realised the power of his mind and his exceptional beauty of character;

she felt love and compassion for him, and rebelled against the fate which robbed him of what was his due. She had never seen him so pale and tired as when the recitation was finished, and her heart ached for him.

The little group of friends round Tenkòvsky shared Natasha's feeling, and were alarmed by his sudden pallor.

At last, to create a diversion, Natasha sprang to her feet, in her usual quick way, and asked Tenkòvsky, who was a great lover of music, if she should play a little. He gladly accepted the offer, and they all went to the music room—a spacious room, with a grand Blüthner in one corner, and well furnished with comfortable old chairs and settees. Tanya followed her sister in astonishment. It was a very unusual thing for Natasha to offer to play to any one; music was, as a rule, the only matter on which she felt shy. She possessed exceptional talent, and could play very well. Music was to her a kind of religion; she reverenced it greatly, and thought that, in Tenkòvsky's present state of mind, nothing could be better for him than to listen to some good music. The little company took their seats in different corners of the half-lit room. Without saying a word, Natasha placed herself at the piano and began to play Tenkòvsky's favourite Chopin prelude. Inspired by her generous sympathy and her desire to comfort her friend, she began by doing her best to play well, but gradually the music itself took possession of her, and she lost consciousness of her audience and her surroundings, and lived only in Chopin's world of sound.

She sat straight on her chair, her eyes had an absent look, and her face wore a tender expression. Her audience were delighted, especially Tenkòvsky and Milyùtine, who was a great lover of music, as all Little Russians are. Milyùtine was enraptured. He sat on a low chair, leaning forward with his elbows propped on his knees, and his hands buried in his hair, which fell over them. He did not stir till the last chord sounded; then he gave a deep sigh and a long admiring look at Natasha. How proud Tanya felt of her dear Natasha for the treat she was giving them all. During the music, Orloff, his wife, and the rest of the large company approached the open door on tiptoe, but remained outside. When the last note had died away, hearty applause resounded. Natasha returned to reality. She looked timid and a little annoyed to see so many people assembled and, hurriedly excusing herself, disappeared.

Half an hour later, when the cuckoo clock in the dining-room was striking twelve, the large house was perfectly dark and silent. Everybody was at rest except Natasha and Tanya; they were sitting by the open window of Tanya's room. They had much to say, though they could understand each other almost without words.

The stillness outside was at times broken by the watchman, who was making his nightly round outside the house, through the back yard and garden, sounding from time to time his wooden alarm rattle to show that some one was awake. These sounds had something in them which always made the girls feel sad. To-night they were excited, and not inclined to sleep. Natasha

was the first to break the silence. She spoke of Tenkòvsky and how greatly they were indebted to him; nobody ever spoke to them of justice and truth, and the real meaning of life, as he did, and how dreadful it was that they could do so little for him now that he was ill and sad. Tanya did her best to soothe her. The air in the room felt oppressive to them, so they decided to go out. They walked carefully along, fearing to waken the dogs which were asleep in the back garden. Natasha suggested that they should sleep on the new haystack. They agreed, and were soon deep in the fragrant soft hay, with their faces turned to the starry sky. By degrees their words grew fewer and fewer, then there were long intervals of silence, and at last they fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

"CAN'T you keep still for half an hour, Natasha? It's impossible to do good work when you are here!"

Nicolas' face was flushed with excitement as he addressed his sister, and Natasha sat down, though not without protest.

"You call that half an hour!" she said. "It was not ten when we came into the studio, and it is nearly twelve now. I wonder how Lev. Semènovitch can be so patient! As for me, I have read myself hoarse, and I think you are an ungrateful wretch."

"I would not have said a word, Natasha, if it had only been reading, but you made so many comments, and talked and chattered so much and were so restless, it disturbed me. Don't you want the portrait to be good?"

"Well! I will be very quiet." Natasha sat down and took up her book, but glanced as she did so at the professor and said, "Aren't you dreadfully tired?"

Tenkòvsky was seated in his arm-chair perfectly still, and Nicolas was taking his portrait in oil.

"Your father and I were up at five this morning; we drove over thirty versts in our round, visiting the sheep folds to see the vaccination of the sheep. I am rather tired, and at times I was in danger of falling asleep, but you, Natàlya Lvòvna, kept me awake."

The professor looked at the brother and sister with his peculiar, kind smile.

"I have less than an hour's work now: can you spare the time?" asked Nicolas, looking entreatingly at Tenkòvsky. "The portrait will be practically finished then, and I shall not need you for the final touches."

To this Tenkòvsky willingly agreed, and the young painter eagerly renewed his work. The silence of the studio was only broken by Natasha's voice as she read with great earnestness Herbert Spencer's Essay on Music; she seemed to realise the duty of restraint, and did her best. Meanwhile, Tenkòvsky looked admiringly at the young artist who stood before his easel, happily absorbed in his work, his steel grey eyes turned to his friend at times with a fixed and piercing glance. His brows were knitted, and he wiped his moist forehead with the palm of his left hand: he was an image of strained will, intent on achieving its utmost. It was Tenkòvsky's fourth sitting, and he knew the studio well in all its dust and disorder, for Nicolas would not allow any one to touch the precious sanctum; he feared that the plaster figures he had brought from Italy might be broken, or his precious paintings scratched by the primitive hand of Dasha. Nicolas was, with justice, considered the most gifted of Orloff's children; from his childhood he had been fond of art and music, but after finishing at school, he had studied law in the University of Moscow, and graduated to his parents' satisfaction. His brothers and sisters were accustomed to call him the "encyclopædia," and consulted him in every difficulty.

Time passed, and Natasha was beginning to feel restless again, when Nicolas said, " Now I think I can relieve you."

Natasha was on her feet and at his side before he had finished speaking. She could not repress a cry of surprise and delight. Tenkòvsky seemed to be looking at her from the canvas. " Oh, you are a great artist, Kòlya," she cried in ecstasy. " Mother must see this; may I bring her? " Before Nicolas had time to answer, she left the room and soon returned accompanied by Orloff and his wife. Nicolas cleared a chair for his mother in that part of the room which gave the best view, and Seraphìma Petròvna sat down with her arms tightly folded, as she always placed them in moments of excitement: her lips were compressed, as if she were forcing herself to silence; only the radiant look in her beautiful eyes expressed her pleasure. Orloff bent down to her and said, " You have every reason to be proud of your Nikolày Seraphìmovitch. This " (pointing to the portrait) " is a real work of art. It does what Antokòlsky taught in his works—it gives the soul: I recognise the best part of my friend. It is a masterpiece, Kòlya! " Orloff grew more and more excited, and, seizing his son by the shoulders, gave him something between an embrace and a shaking. The news spread that the portrait was finished, and, one by one, the children came in and stood round the easel. Tanya came directly from the class-room where she worked daily, teaching her younger brothers; she still had on her long black apron, spotted all over with white chalk. She stood by the easel for some time, quite motionless

and silent, absorbed in the contemplation of the portrait, then, looking round, and seeing that Nicolas had retired to a corner and was busy washing his brushes, she noiselessly approached him and, putting her soft little hand on his shoulder, looked lovingly into his eyes and whispered, "Will you paint father, now you know what you can do?"

"If you can get him to sit, you little goose: that is the difficulty. Do that and I will do the rest."

"I will do my best," said Tanya.

"And you will have to sit for me soon. I want to put on canvas that lofty forehead of yours before it is furrowed with wrinkles."

Both laughed heartily. Suddenly Dasha appeared on the threshold, announcing that luncheon was served, and put an end to the happy gathering. The children rushed to the door and descended the wooden staircase to the hall, leaping down two or three steps at a time, while their elders followed more soberly.

Engaged in an animated conversation, they entered the dining-room and took their places at the table covered with different dishes, hot and cold. Nobody waited on them; they helped themselves and their neighbours, and this made the meal simpler and cosier. The portrait was the topic of conversation.

"Our drawing-room is not the place for a portrait of Tenkòvsky; it ought to belong to the University of Odessa, where he has delighted and enchanted so many generations of students," said Natasha, looking round in excitement. Several voices answered, all speaking at the same time.

" The university could order a copy."

" Its place is at Pokròvskoe, where he has devoted friends! "

" Don't listen to Natasha, Kòlya; father's study is the best place," cried Urik, trying to outdo all the others in his high-pitched childish voice.

During the heat of this discussion the post arrived from town, and a postbag containing letters, newspapers, and magazines was brought and placed on the table. This caused a general lull, as every one looked and hoped for a letter. One was addressed to Tenkòvsky; he opened it and said, after reading it, " I am sorry, but I shall have to leave you for to-night's steamer. The Minister of Education is expected from St. Petersburg to visit the university, and I must be there."

" Oh! " and " What a pity! " resounded from all parts of the table.

" Nothing can be done! I must go and attend to all those stupid formalities." Tenkòvsky was visibly annoyed. " But we must turn this afternoon to good purpose," he said.

They eagerly discussed how that could be done, and an excursion by boat was decided on.

An hour later, the boat was gliding over the smooth surface of the river near the bank. Natasha and Tanya, in light cotton dresses, occupied the middle bench with the oars. Natasha's rich brown hair was uncovered; Tanya wore a straw hat adorned with pale blue ribbons, very becoming to her fair skin. Tenkòvsky, in a suit of undyed silk, a black straw hat

on his curly hair, held the rudder. In the prow sat Sònya, without hat, for she liked to imitate Natasha whenever possible. Her pale cheeks were paler than usual, and her prominent short-sighted eyes with pale eyelashes were fixed on the fresh green shore. She was surrounded by the children.

Milyùtine, in a large coarse straw hat and his wide blouse, sat behind Natasha, ready to replace her or Tanya at any moment.

They kept near to the shore to enjoy the cool shadow of the old willows. Just as the boat rounded the corner, they came to a narrow stream which flowed along the orchard. On one side they saw the green banks of the garden, old willows and bushes steeping their branches in the water; on the other a great mass of tall green reeds, which gave a long whispering sound as they rustled in the wind.

The low sustained notes of a toad came at regular intervals, mingled with the joyous song of the sedge-warbler.

As the boat glided on and on, Tenkòvsky watched with increasing interest the various water plants in the transparent stream. He dipped his hand in the water and brought out some leaves, stems, and whole plants. Then, showing a beautiful green leaf to Milyùtine, " A splendid specimen, this, for the study of the cell and cellular tissue. And just look at this *Vallesneria spiralis*, it is a beautiful example of the circulation of the sap in the cell, and this other shows the breathing apparatus in the stomata."

The professor grew more and more animated; he

filled with water a small wooden bucket which he found at the bottom of the boat, and put all his treasures in it. The girls followed his proceedings with great interest.

"This," he said, pointing to the bucket, "would serve to demonstrate a very interesting lecture on the histology of plants."

"How we should love to hear it!" exclaimed Natasha; "we know no botany!"

"Are you really interested?" Tenkòvsky consulted his watch. "We have over two hours still. If you make haste we can soon reach the laboratory, and there I shall find all I need."

The offer was received with joyful acclamations by both girls; they took to the oars with renewed energy, and beamed with pleasure as they rowed. They both worked well, the boat advanced rapidly, and they soon landed on the meadows by the hazel bushes in view of the laboratory. The younger children remained in the boat, for they had their fishing rods with them. The rest of the party followed Tenkòvsky into the laboratory. Here, with Milyùtine's help, the microscope was soon adjusted, and the necessary re-agents found. To see Tenkòvsky manipulate with his razor, cutting sections and showing them under the microscope, was something to admire in itself; his skill, the sureness of his eye and hand, the grace and elegance of all his movements, the pleasure with which he performed them, were irresistibly attractive.

He spoke first of the cell and of the elements of which it is composed, then of the life of the cell; from that he

passed to life in general and human life in particular, referring with special enthusiasm to the part played in it by science. He drew for his little group of listeners a wonderful picture of what the human intellect, striving for knowledge, has already achieved. He showed how far mankind has already penetrated into the secrets of nature, and what distant horizons would be discovered if the devotion to truth and knowledge became universal. He spoke of the obligation on every human being, however limited his powers, to contribute in some measure to the service of truth. The lecturer closed with the words, " In this pursuit of knowledge and truth lies the real source of human happiness, and it gives the only possibility of solving the great social questions which confront us to-day. This pursuit therefore should be the object of every thoughtful mind."

Even Milyùtine, who well knew his teacher's wonderful gift for exciting interest, was deeply impressed. As for the girls, it was a revelation to them. They saw the world in quite a new light, and a vital thirst for knowledge was awakened in them, a feeling of reverence for the universality of science.

How the time flew as they listened to such a lecture. Milyùtine had to remind his teacher that he must catch the steamer, and they took the shortest way through the orchard to the house.

All the rest of Orloff's family were assembled on the terrace waiting for Tenkòvsky to say good-bye. Tea was hastily partaken of. The carriage was ready; the professor, accompanied by Orloff himself, took his

place in it, and several parcels containing new-laid eggs, home-made butter, a basket of strawberries, were brought by the old nurse and placed in the carriage. Tenkòvsky did not dare to refuse these gifts, knowing how grieved the old nurse would be. Amid shouts of "Come back soon! Very soon! Keep well! We shall miss you!" the carriage drove out of the gate. And indeed the dear professor's going was always deeply lamented in Pokròvskoe.

CHAPTER IV

It was not quite four in the morning when the watchman gave three gentle knocks at Tanya's window. At the sound of the first she opened her eyes, and in a moment was on her feet. She dressed hurriedly, taking great care not to wake Natasha, who slept in the room adjoining. In less than a quarter of an hour she was ready and, in order to avoid the creaking door, she gently opened the window and sprang out into the garden on to a bed of violets growing directly beneath. The flowers and grass were wet with morning dew. The sun had not yet risen, but the flush on the fleecy clouds floating in the pale blue sky showed that he would soon appear. These solemn early hours of the day, when Nature seemed so peaceful before she awoke, these last moments of the quiet night, the first streak of light, the first sounds of reviving life, the harmony and peace, filled Tanya's heart with a quiet hope. She had spent a restless night. After Tenkòvsky's lecture, when she was alone in her room, she recalled much that he had said, and felt how different the scientific, logical manner in which he developed his ideas was from the mode of thought to which she was accustomed in religion. Fascinated by his ideas, she still felt how difficult it would be to reconcile them with the orthodox creed in which she had been brought up. Her deeply religious parents observed strictly all the rules pre-

scribed by the Greek Church, and wished her to follow in their steps. Poor Tanya's head grew quite hot with eager thinking as she tried to reconcile all the contradictory ideas which crossed her mind. She could not arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. The fresh air that blew on her face seemed to sweep away all the impressions of the restless night. She was possessed by a great wish to be happy, to enjoy the peace of mind and soul which she knew to be a capacity of her nature. She heard the first long-drawn sound of the church bell ringing for matins. She longed to be near simple-minded people, blessed with sincere, unquestioning faith. She left the front garden and directed her steps to the church, walking with a brisk energetic step, and scarcely looking to right or left as she crossed the village; she hardly replied to the greetings of the people she met.

Notwithstanding the early hour, the village was alive. Women, carrying pails of water on a yoke across their shoulders, stopped and turned to look after her. Peasants, following their carts as they moved slowly along the road, recognised the landlord's daughter, and wondered what she was doing at so early an hour. Hearing the creaking of the cart wheels, Tanya looked up, responded to their greetings, dropped her head again, and walked on more hastily still.

When she entered the church, she saw that it was nearly empty; only a few elderly women were kneeling; some knelt upright and crossed themselves, looking at the eikon and moving their lips as they recited their prayers; others lay with their foreheads on the bare

floor absorbed in their devotions. The voice of the old priest, "Father Peter," was reciting from behind the altar, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, goodwill to men."

Tanya loved these words, but to hear them when the early light was stealing through the old church windows, in presence of the few simple people, made her thrill in all her being; she felt a wave of warm childlike faith and love mount to her heart, her eyes filled with tears, and she too knelt on the floor and prayed.

The sweet odour of incense escaping from the censer which old Father Peter swung in his right hand, his low chanting voice as he recited the prayers, the half-lit church, so old and familiar, all had a soothing effect on Tanya. The painful doubts and contradictions, all the disturbing questions aroused in her mind by yesterday's lecture, were lulled to rest. She soon grew unconscious of time and place, absorbed in the feeling of being God's child. She felt so near Him that it seemed as if she were part of Him, and this made her infinitely happy. The absence of the choir and deacon made matins on week days a short and simple service; assisted only by the old sexton, Father Peter had soon finished. Tanya was roused from her deep meditation by his voice, which sounded nearer; she rose to her feet and saw the old priest standing before the shrine facing his little congregation. He was holding a golden cross in his wrinkled hands. A light breeze coming through the open window stirred his long grey hair and beard. His pale blue eyes met Tanya's, but he did not recognise her in her dark corner. A kind smile

played upon his lips as he murmured all God's blessings on those present and bade them go in peace. Then he disappeared behind the altar door. As Tanya turned to go she saw in a corner by the door the figure of a woman; she was standing by the Virgin's eikon, and was trying to adjust the wax candles burning in the candlesticks. The light from the candles fell on her face and showed its great pallor, the dark rings round her eyes, and an expression of profound sadness. Her ragged dress, the old worn shawl covering her head and shoulders, her yellow bony fingers, all spoke of illness, misery, and privation. Tanya was at once struck by the woman's aspect: it formed such a contrast to the overflowing happiness she felt in her own heart. The desire to help, to do something kind, was irresistible and conquered her natural shyness. Without realising what she was doing, she hurriedly approached the stranger, put her arms round her, and pressed a kiss on her cheek; then she searched her pocket and pressed her purse into the woman's hand; with a kind smile she disappeared through the door. She saw the astonished look on the woman's face and, as she turned away, she heard the faint voice saying, " God will send you a good husband! " " No," she thought, " it is not that I want, but to feel always such warm love and to serve and help and work as God wishes me."

She avoided the main road and turned to the narrow path beside the river. Here and there the path disappeared, being lost under outcropping portions of sandstone, which Tanya had to leap across. Between the outcrops were pools of crystal clear water, formed

by the streams from the river which flowed through the rock. Beside one of these pools Tanya knelt to drink, and as she filled the palm of her hand with the cold water she saw something in the distance appearing above the smooth surface of the river: the river was gilded just then by the oblique rays of the sun, and several figures, immersed up to their necks, were slowly moving towards the shore. She soon recognised them as fishermen, and watched their approach. They were dragging a large net. When they were clear of the shore, she saw the fish leap in the air and fall back. Women and children were already gathering together ready to receive the fish in their baskets and pails. Tanya called out to the men, "God help you!" and passed on her way.

The narrow path winding beside the river Boug led directly to the Pokròvskoe house. On entering, she saw the dining-room windows wide open. Tanya looked round the spacious room and was dazzled by the intense light which filled it. The white ceiling and the walls, the beautifully clean tablecloth, the empty tea-glasses standing in rows upon a square tray, the huge brass samovar that boiled at one end of the table, everything reflected the brilliant sun which poured into the room through four large windows. But, more than anything else, Natasha's face beamed as she sat by the samovar. "Oh, Tanya, can you tell me what it was Tenkòvsky said yesterday when speaking of the division of the cell, before he passed to his general ideas on life? Do you remember? Up to that point my notes are clear and very good, but there"—pointing

to a notebook which lay on the cloth beside a tea-glass she had just emptied and pushed aside—" there is a blank, and I cannot get a true record of that wonderful lecture! " She looked at her sister again, and this time with closer attention, as Tanya made no sound: she was standing close beside Natasha. " What is the matter with you? Where have you been? Oh, in church; I smell the incense in your dress! "

" Yes, I have been in church and I feel the happier for it! " said Tanya, flushing with excitement.

" I can't see that it really makes you happier, at least not for long! "

" You ought not to speak like that! You grieve me! "

" I want to help you, Tanya. When I look at you sometimes, I dread lest you should leave us and enter a convent and become one of those poor useless creatures "—she pointed to the convent which they could see through the windows on the opposite shore of the river—" who pray and fast, fast and pray, and do nothing useful in the world."

" I shall never do that! "

" Why not, if you shut yourself from light and are afraid of having a straightforward talk about the matter, even with me, when you know that I wish only to help you? Do you think that I, too, haven't suffered these struggles and doubts? But I always preferred the fresh air, while you sat on nurse's knee listening and listening to all the tales she stuffed into your poor little head! Those dreadful tales about hell and its sufferings, all those terrible punishments which she tried to describe! Such nonsense, and so cruel to say

it to a child! And I can see you with wide-open eyes devouring every word! I hear her voice telling you, 'And this pain, Tanya, not for a day or a month or a year, but always, always, for eternity!' And you shuddered and pressed your head against her bosom, while I shut my ears with my fingers and ran into the garden, disgusted by all those horrors. And our Church says exactly the same. Doesn't it occur to you that we ought not to trust to such a religion?"

"But when one begins to shake and undermine," said Tanya gravely, "everything may fall into ruins. Oh, you don't know what I suffer sometimes! Last Sunday, at Holy Communion, I had already ascended the step and was standing before the altar door, when it was thrown open, a cold wind from the altar touched my face and seemed to pass through my body. Father Peter was holding the golden cup with the Holy Sacrament. He spoke in his trembling voice, 'This is the veritable Sacred Body and this is the veritable Sacred Blood of our Redeemer! Approach with faith and awe and partake of it!' And, just at that moment, a voice in me cried, 'It is bread and wine, and nothing else!' And how wicked I felt! I nearly ran away. I forced myself to stay, but when I saw the large red silk handkerchief which the deacon was holding under my chin, so that not a single sacred drop should fall on the floor, I nearly choked with the wine in the spoon. It was dreadful, dreadful!"

"But why do you take it so tragically? Your healthy human understanding protested against miracles, and you were right."

"You may say what you like, but you must agree that our Church service is full of poetry. Those wonderful prayers! And the singing! What touching melodies! And what a pleasure to hear Christ's life read to you again and again! I don't wonder that Tschaikovsky composed some of his finest melodies standing in the dark corner of a Russian church."

"Yes! I understand that. I see how our Church service can appeal to a poetic imagination like Tschaikovsky's. That is quite another matter! I only say that it cannot give you light, knowledge, and peace. Do you know what helped me most to shake off that creed? The gradually ripening conviction that the God whom our Church teaches us to reverence is a most imperfect being, far inferior to the best of us!"

Tanya smiled at her sister, though the tears were filling her eyes. "I have thought over all you say, but I never saw it so clearly before. I was reading *Adam Bede* yesterday, and wished I had been brought up in the Protestant faith; it is simpler and nobler than ours, and it does not condemn other creeds. How fervently I wish I could know the truth and do what is right. I need God's help much more than you, Natasha; you are stronger than I. I could not do half my duties without prayer and daily communion with God."

"I am not stronger, but I love light and have no mystical tendencies in me, that is all. It was only by giving myself absolute freedom of thought that I arrived at my present state of mind; there are hundreds and hundreds of things I do not know; I wish to know them, but I see now that some of them are inaccessible,

to my mind at any rate, and I try not to trouble. I feel many times over something in myself which seems to me higher than the body. I do not know what it is. Amid beautiful scenery, or when listening to great music, I feel near the source of goodness, if I may say so. How freely you will breathe, Tanya, when you realise all that and liberate yourself from this childish faith; in your heart of hearts you cannot believe in it. Instead of dwelling in the clouds, live here on this wonderful earth; life is so beautiful and so short, there is no time to lose. Wherever you look there is something to do—work of every kind for every one, and so much to love and enjoy! "

Tanya's pale face was wet with tears; she was too much excited to speak, and too reserved to do as she wished and clasp Natasha to her heart.

Suddenly the sound of many footsteps entering the gate diverted the girls' attention.

CHAPTER V

SOME thirty or forty men were approaching the gates of Pokròvskoe House; as they came they raised a cloud of dust, and the nondescript colour of their garments blended with this into one dull mass. The only spot of colour was the red necktie of Gòlub, the tenor chorister; he wore a long woollen necktie wound several times round his throat, and it stood out like a flame of colour in the grey. No one knew whether he wore it for the purpose of attracting the village belles or as a means of protection for his voice.

In the first rank stood Beresòvsky, the richest peasant in the village. He was tall, handsome, and finely built, and, alone among them all, did not wear dull grey garments, but a dark blue Sunday suit. On his right hand walked the churchwarden, an old man with grey head and beard and a rather stout figure, but with a bright, clever face. He was greatly devoted to the church because it seemed to him the one spot in which rich and poor were truly equal. On Beresòvsky's other hand walked the village elder, or syndic, a tall old man with a commanding figure, who wore on his breast a metal badge as a sign of his office.

These three entered the open gate of Pokròvskoe. They were followed by the choir-master, short, pock-marked, and curly-headed, whose knowledge of reading and writing and law made him a person of great im-

portance, since he wrote all letters and petitions for the community. He was accompanied by Antòn, the cook, a tall thin man with a pale discontented face and shambling gait, who had lost his health through many years of cooking for the Orloff family. Next to Antòn was Philip, Orloff's former coachman, a dark, handsome fellow, with a keenly intelligent face and lively brown eyes, a regular "Trotz Kopf"—a short man with a resolute nature. The choir-master and Gòlub belonged to the youngest of the group; the majority were middle-aged, fathers of families.

As they approached the windows the two girls involuntarily drew back. Natasha pressed both hands to her burning cheeks as was her habit when excited, and said, "Oh! I wish they would be more confident and hold their heads higher. When I see them together like this I realise what a power they are! They could take the land for their own if they chose, and yet they work for it with the sweat of their brow. What intelligent faces, Tanya! Oh, I love them! Nothing could make me happier than to work for them."

"I wonder if father knows they are here!" said Tanya.

"Dasha has just gone to speak to them. She will let him know," replied Natasha.

The men had turned the corner and disappeared from the sight of the two sisters, and were now close to the front door. They took their places—some in groups under the trees and a few below the terrace. The leaders spoke to Dasha. Several approached the well, where a kitchen maid was pumping water, and asked

for a drink. She held out her wooden pail, and they took off their caps, crossed themselves, and drank. The housekeeper passed over the yard carrying milk, nodded to those she knew among the peasants, and disappeared. Soon after came Melànya, the second housemaid, with more freshly ironed ladies' dresses and petticoats, holding them high above her head to keep them from the ground; she smiled at her cousin Gòlub, but did not stay to speak.

There was not a sound except the clapping of the storks, who stood each on one leg on the kitchen roof, and who looked over the yard below with all the gravity of police superintendents. The two faithful house dogs, Barbòss and Rìgie, made a great show of protecting the house from the intruders, but Ivàn, the coachman, called them off and locked them up in the back kitchen. The pet dog, Pilad, and the cat, Mashka, were sunning themselves on the terrace; the cat remained where it was, blinking undisturbed, but Pilad got up and, wagging his tail, went from one peasant to another, thrusting his nose into their hands and making friends with all. "What a pet!" said one of the old men, caressing him. The men had not to wait long. In a few moments the door was opened and Lev. Baltazàrovitch appeared on the threshold.

He wore a spotless suit of unbleached linen, his silky beard was parted in two, combed and perfumed, and, as he had come direct from his study, he carried a pen behind his ear. He smiled in a friendly fashion on the peasants.

"Good morning, brothers!" were his first words.

Without any sign of haste they removed their caps, and the three leaders advanced towards Orloff.

The elder spoke clearly and distinctly, but kept shuffling from one foot to the other.

"In your great kindness, barin (sir), we beg you to listen to us. We are asked to speak about the land."

"What do you want?" asked Orloff, pushing down Pilad, who was leaping on him all the time.

"It is about the land, barin! We have not enough for hay or corn, let alone to turn our beasts into. Unless we can have more we shall soon be bankrupt. Beresòvsky and a few more can make ends meet, but for the poor families, or those with many children, it is hopeless."

"Say plainly what you want," said Orloff, driving Pilad away.

"The village would like to have another field," said the elder; "but we do not want to give rent for it, but to pay with part of the crop."

"Do you know exactly how much you want?" asked Orloff.

"Thirty desyatins would be sufficient, but we could not provide grain for sowing. We would like these conditions: your field and your grain; our tools, our horses, and our work; and a third part of the crop for you, which we will bring to your barn."

"Give me time to think it over, and then we will discuss the conditions later on in my office," said Orloff. "Is this all you ask?"

Both the elder and the churchwarden now spoke together.

"If you could be so kind, barin, we should like to have a lighter punishment for stray animals. You cannot know it, barin, but your agent has taken several of our draught oxen just now when we need them most, and kept them for several days."

"But it happens too often," said Orloff. "Yesterday, as I rode up by the spring crops, I saw two cows in the wheat trampling it down. This is a great loss to me, and I must take measures against it. I don't believe you do it on purpose, but you leave your children to do the herding, and they amuse themselves and the animals stray. Take care it does not happen again, and I will speak to my agent."

"We do not send children," said the elder. "They are boys of fourteen."

Several peasants spoke at once. "If they would only keep the beasts a day, but they keep them several days, and Fedòtoff threatened to keep them altogether."

"Fedòtoff has no right to do that, and I will tell him so. Is that all?"

Silence ensued. Two of the younger peasants looked up and nudged each other as if uncertain which ought to speak.

"Well! Does any one want to say more?" asked Orloff.

He was aware as he spoke of a certain tension in the crowd, and a growing excitement. One of the young men began to speak in his stumbling ungrammatical way.

"People from town come to us to tell us new times are at hand."

He could not proceed for his companion interrupted him by shouting, " We heard that the little father czar is going to divide the land—to take it away from your lordship and divide it among us."

Orloff grew pale, he spoke with a forced smile and in an uncertain voice. " Surely you don't believe it? " he said. " Foolish and wicked people tell you these things because they want to rouse you to rebellion. They themselves don't believe what they say, but they want you to make disturbances which they can take advantage of."

" Oh no! " the youth shouted, " they are not that kind. They want nothing for themselves. They are students, and teach us for our own sakes. They know how hard our life is. They have been in the fields and seen our animals, and they know our land is not sufficient."

Here the speaker was interrupted by a man in the background, who called loudly, " Another year like this and we shall have a famine. The children are dying like flies."

At this moment several spoke together.

Orloff raised his voice and said he would not listen unless they spoke one at a time.

Philip, who was standing behind, pushed his way to the front, raised his curly head, and looked Orloff in the face without a trace of shyness.

" We want justice," he said. " Hunger, poverty, and injustice meet us wherever we turn. The taxes grow heavier every year. The tax collector will soon be taking our very skins."

"But what can I do?" asked Orloff. "What has this to do with me?"

Again several voices spoke together.

"I won't listen," Orloff shouted. "This is not the place for such disorder! Go home, all of you, and send me a deputation who are more reasonable and know how to behave."

The crowd was silent.

Orloff continued in a gentle tone, "You know well that I have never refused to help any of you when you were in trouble, but I won't have this disorder! Don't believe everything you hear! The czar has no intentions of the kind! Property is property. If he took my land to give you, he would have to take it away from you to give it to those who are poorer still."

"There are none poorer than we," cried one of the former speakers, and again several spoke together.

"You can come again when you are quieter, but, for the present, go home," commanded Orloff.

His pen still behind his ear, his face white with excitement, he turned his back on the crowd and disappeared.

It was his first experience of the kind. The rumour about the agitations among the peasants of Pokròvskoe was true then!

He could hear the voices outside, and they sounded to him like the rolling of thunder of an approaching storm. He left the hall, turned into his study, rang the bell, and ordered the servant to send for Fedòtoff.

"I have trusted him too much," he murmured between his teeth as he paced the study to and fro. "He is a brute, and no better than the rest!" he exclaimed

with indignation. He thought with bitterness of the agitators as stupid and wicked people. " How naive to tell me directly into my face all these tales about the division of land. Poor wretches! Justice they want, justice! There is no justice in this world! "

Meanwhile the village elder did his best to pacify the crowd.

" I have to answer for you all, and I don't want any riots," he exclaimed.

He walked off, drawing up his tall figure to its full height, his white head still uncovered, and a big stick in his hand. There was something about his personality which always impressed the village, and one by one they followed him.

As they filed past the dining-room Natasha leaned out and spoke to the poorest, " Don't forget that you are invited to come and see me this evening."

They nodded, said they would not forget, and went their way.

" But have you really invited them? " said Tanya, in the greatest astonishment.

" Yes! why not? Mother and father are going to town and I seized the opportunity. Don't look so horrified, Tanya, there's nothing wrong. I want to have a little feast for them, and you must help."

" Where is it to be? " asked Tanya, more and more astonished.

" In the schoolroom at six o'clock. I invited thirty."

" You are mad, Natasha! "

" Not at all! Melànya is going to help and will get the samovar ready; I have settled everything."

"And you didn't say a word to me!"

"There was no need to say anything till it was arranged. I will tell mother when it is all over."

"You ought to have been a boy."

"I wish I were."

CHAPTER VI

It was a very busy morning for Lev. Baltazàrovitch, for when he had seen the peasants' deputation, and given Fedòtoff a good scolding, he had still several people to interview. The shepherds had come to get their week's provisions. The Orloff estate was of immense size, and the sheep were dispersed in different directions on the great steppes; it was impossible for the shepherds to come often for provisions, so they were in the habit of taking a weekly supply: flour, salt, lard, etc. They came with little covered carts, and brought their great fierce sheep-dogs with them, which were at that moment quarrelling with the dogs of the Orloff household.

Lev. Baltazàrovitch had asked to see the shepherds because he wished to question them concerning the sheep which had been vaccinated, how it had taken, how they were, etc. He hurried over it, however, for several peasant women had been waiting more than an hour to see him.

These women were crouched down on the floor in different corners of the large hall. They had come to ask the barin's help mostly because of illness. One had a son with the fever and wanted him to give her quinine; another had brought her sick baby for his advice.

There was a doctor in the village and a hospital in town, but the peasants had far more trust in Lev. Baltazàrovitch.

When he had done with the shepherds, old Caterina, a former housekeeper, came up to him. "For Heaven's sake, barin," she said, "give me some medicine for Ossip. He had to spend a night in the reeds when he was shooting, he got fever, and it has altered him so that I scarcely know my own son. He is nothing but a walking shadow. Have pity on us, barin."

"Have you not called in the doctor?"

"We have, barin, but his medicine does no good."

"Surely he gives you quinine?"

"It may be, barin, but it does not work like your quinine. Do help us, barin. Ossip has two attacks every day, it begins early in the morning and he does nothing but shiver, then he perspires."

"Very well, I will give you some powders. You must let him have them when the perspiration comes on after the shivering fit. You understand?"

"Oh, yes! Heaven bless you, barin."

Caterina went away, and the woman with the baby next approached.

"Well, what is it?" Orloff asked.

"Please, barin, the baby is very ill."

"Well! why do you come to me? I am not a doctor. You must go either to the doctor or to the hospital in town."

"Oh, barin, we would rather you treated him."

"I could not do it. How often have I told you so!" In spite of himself Orloff was interested and could not help asking, "What is the matter with the child?"

"I don't understand, barin, but he has convulsions

sometimes, and I am afraid he is going to die." She broke into tears and Orloff was deeply moved.

"Well, well," he said, "I am going to town to-day, and I will visit the hospital myself and tell them about you. You had better take the child there at once."

"We are afraid of the hospital, barin."

"You must try not to be. They have very good doctors and very kind ones."

Orloff turned to a third woman. "And you, Parascovia, what do you want?"

"I have come to thank you, barin; my daughter's fever is so much better. It comes only every second day. Will you let us have some more powders?"

Orloff went to his study to get them, while the other women slowly left the hall.

All this time the best phaeton had been standing before the door waiting for the Orloffs. The horses were harnessed four abreast, two of them in traces, the other two attached very loosely; they were magnificent horses, the whole team brown in colour. The trace horses were pawing the ground impatiently, and the wheelers were springing and prancing in all directions. Ivàn, the coachman, had the utmost difficulty in keeping them in hand. From time to time Dasha came out of the house carrying parcels, rolls of manuscript, or shawls, which she stowed away in the carriage. Urik, Orloff's little son, kept running in and out, and patting the horses eagerly.

At last Seraphìma Petròvna appeared in a long black cloak which covered her whole dress, a little satchel in her hand. Urik ran up to her and kept reminding her

of the purchases she had promised to make for him. "Now remember my chocolate, mother, *not* the Landrinn but Einem this time. And green sealing wax, not red."

Seraphìma Petròvna smiled and promised. Orloff appeared, the two servants helped them into the carriage, and Urik covered his mother's dress carefully with the driving rug.

The horses bounded away, but Orloff stopped them in a moment and called out that he had left his portfolio in the study. Urik ran back for it, and came to thrust it in his father's hand.

Then at last the carriage was able to start, and the horses leapt and bounded and almost flew, in their delight in being off.

As soon as her parents were gone Natasha decided to set about preparations for the supper. She knew that the housekeeper would be in the storeroom and went there at once, crossing the hall at the back of the house and running down a long corridor with glass on one side. A huge bunch of keys hung on the storeroom door—a sign that the housekeeper was already there.

The storeroom was a very interesting place, well worth a visit. As Pokròvskoe was some distance from Nikolàeff—the nearest town—almost everything the family needed had to be prepared in the house; the housekeeper kept the storeroom very clean and in beautiful order, and it was crowded with delicacies for children. It was a long room, lighted from above. A very mingled odour met Natasha as she entered; there were dried mushrooms threaded on long strings and hanging from

the ceiling, there were strings of dried fish, and sacks of nuts. One shelf held jars containing every possible kind of jam, and several filled with roseleaf conserve (a large portion of the garden was planted with a special kind of rose the petals of which were good for this sweetmeat). Another shelf was full of pickles—pickled cucumbers, pickled water melons, vegetable marrows, etc. The top shelf held different kinds of vodkas flavoured with fruits—cherries, plums, and various berries. There were also dried fruits—prunes, dried and sugared and impaled on sticks, apples, and pears; there were large receptacles full of honeycomb and piles of honeycake. On a large dish was a special cake; it was in the form of a step ladder, made of dough, with birds on each step, also made of dough, with currant eyes; over the whole was poured a preparation of caramel. This dish was made only once a year and was a spring delicacy; as soon as the first birds arrived the cook made and served it, to the children's great delight.

Natasha opened the door of the storeroom and looked in.

"Who is there?" asked Irina, the housekeeper, who had once been the children's nurse.

"It is I—Natasha. I want to see you very badly." Natasha sat down on a stool and spoke in her most coaxing voice.

"I hope you are going to be good to-day, nurse."

"I—I am always good," Irina answered. "Haven't I brought you all up just like a mother, and loved you as if you were my own? And you, Natasha, were always

the most troublesome. You were such a mischief! You plagued the governess and you plagued your dear mother, and I had to whip you, which grieved me terribly. You were bad, Natasha."

"Yes, I know I was," said Natasha penitently, "but don't think of that now, nurse. Be good and give me what I want."

"What do you want?"

"Well—to begin with—four lemons."

"Four lemons! How can you possibly need four lemons all at once?"

"Never mind, nurse. That is my affair. Let me have them please."

In her heart of hearts, Irina loved Natasha better than any one else, and Natasha knew it well.

"Yes," she said, "you'll give me the lemons, and then I want some jam. Just look at all that great row of jars. You can spare some quite easily. I won't ask for apricot or strawberry, because I know you value those, but plum will do quite well, or cherry. Let me have one of those jars!"

"A jar of jam! A whole jar of jam! But why?

"Never you mind, nurse! It's my secret! You'll get old too quickly if you want to know so much."

"But does your mother know?"

"I will tell her as soon as she comes back."

"But she will blame me for giving you the things!"

"Oh, no, she won't, nurse! I promise you. I take all the responsibility. I want you to let me have some sugar too; and some butter and two big loaves of bread."

"Natasha! Natasha! What are you going to do?"

"It is all right, nurse, quite right!"

"If it is for the poor," said Irina, "you must not take it. If we give everything away we shall be just as poor ourselves!"

"Oh no! We could feed a great many families and not feel it."

By degrees Natasha obtained all the things she wanted, and packed them in a large basket which she found in the storeroom.

"You can't carry all that," said Irina.

"Oh, can't I! I'm as strong as a horse. Thank you so much, you dear angel!"

Natasha went out carrying the basket; she passed along the corridor and, standing on the large square stone at the door, called at the top of her voice, "Melànya! Melànya!" and Melànya came running.

Melànya was always a delightful figure to look at, dressed in a bright-coloured cotton gown with a cotton handkerchief tied round her head and under her chin. They crossed the courtyard, and, as they reached the road, they saw Tanya in a short skirt and a wide-brimmed hat which nearly hid her face. She carried a walking stick, and was returning from one of those long solitary rambles in the fields which she so loved. She used to say they helped her to collect her thoughts, and to blow away the cobwebs which prevented her from seeing things in their true light.

She joined them and said she would help them.

"That's right, Tanya," said Natasha. "If you help, we will manage splendidly. I got all the things out of

nurse! It was not easy, but I managed! Melànya! Have you bought that fish I gave you money for?"

"Yes. It is in the schoolroom!"

"Well, you must cook it for me. If you burn it I shall be cross. You know how terribly cross I can be when I choose. But if you do it well, Melànya, you shall have a beautiful scarlet kerchief—the best possible. Do you understand?"

Melànya smiled and said she would do her best.

The three girls crossed the dusty road to the schoolroom.

The building was in the form of a cross, with the two arms very short; it had a thatched roof on which were two storks' nests, and all round the building were old acacia trees.

This building had been originally made by Lev. Baltazàrovitch as a hospital for his serfs. When, however, serfdom was abolished the semstvos had to build hospitals. This building was then for a short time used as an almshouse; lately, however, their father had given it over to the girls. Tanya had arranged a school for the peasant children in one of the large rooms, and in the other Natasha gave lectures and addresses to the elder peasants. In the schoolroom were several cupboards filled with books; these formed a library which Natasha had got together for the peasants; it consisted of cheap, simple volumes which she had purchased out of her own money. The fence round the building was made of reeds. The three girls went in.

"Let us go to the kitchen first," said Natasha, "and

see if all the things are there! Melànya, did you get the spoons and knives and plates, as I told you?"

"Yes! I took them from the kitchen after lunch! But how the cook scolded me!"

"Never mind, Melànya. We are doing something good. You will be glad to-night when you see the people enjoy themselves." Natasha looked round. "Yes," she said, "everything is here, and you have got the two samovars! Take the bucket to the well and draw some water, and be quick, Melànya. There is so much to do. Tanya, we will go to the schoolroom."

The two girls put on their aprons and set to work. The school tables were arranged together down the room in one long line. The table so made was covered with a white cloth, and the provisions were arranged. The lemons were cut in their round slices and placed in glass dishes; down the centre plates were filled with bublikie which Natasha had ordered from town. These bublikie are Russian rolls made of unsweetened dough, cut out in the form of the letter "O" and cooked in boiling water. The peasants are especially fond of them.

Two dishes were filled with jam and placed at each end of the table. Tanya and Natasha next cut up the bread and arranged it. White bread is considered a great dainty by Russian peasants.

Candles in metal candlesticks were placed down the centre of the table, and, as they wished to make a brilliant illumination, lighted lamps were placed on the cupboards and in every corner of the room.

Chairs from the lecture room were next arranged round the table.

These preparations were mostly made in silence, but from time to time Natasha would exclaim with a sigh—

"How awkward you are, Tanya! You let everything fall! Do be quick, you little dreamer!"

The girls were just finishing when Milyùtine entered with several books under his arm.

"I wish I could have helped you," he explained. "But I have been so busy in the laboratory it was impossible. How well everything looks! It is quite delightful."

The girls took off their aprons and were ready for their guests. The peasants arrived with great punctuality, and all in one body, as if they had waited for each other. They were a band of about forty—men and women, but the men were in the majority. Natasha had selected them from among the poorest peasants, and most were parents of the children whom she and Tanya taught. The men were clothed in simple garments of a mixed material, wool and cotton, and the women all had their kerchiefs tied round their heads. Their dress was clean and neat. They entered with simple dignity, and Natasha stood at the door to receive them. They knew her democratic feeling, so they did not use any great ceremony; they bowed to her, but not too low, and shook hands. She directed them to their places. They were very grave and quiet, but quite natural; no one crowded, and the two elders—men with white beards—were seated on either side of Natasha. Natasha's eyes shone like stars at the sight of their pleasure. Before sitting down she introduced Milyùtine to them. "Our friend," she said, "has been

kind enough to join us, and has promised to read something I hope you will enjoy."

They bowed to Milyùtine as a sign of gratitude.

Two shepherd lads, who had walked eight miles from one of the sheep stations in the steppes, came in last of all.

At length all were seated except Tanya, whose business it was to see that everything was right.

The door opened and Melànya appeared, smiling good-naturedly, and carrying in both hands a boiling samovar, which she placed on a low table beside Natasha.

Melànya next brought in the fried fish, cut in pieces, and Milyùtine and Tanya served every one; the peasants handed the glasses of tea, the lemon, and the sugar simply but politely; nothing was dropped or spilt, and the meal began. Silence was maintained as a sign of respect by the younger members; only the two old men talked to Natasha about the weather, the prospects of the harvest, etc.

Whenever Tanya saw a glass empty she took it and filled it again with tea. In this way the samovar was soon empty, and Melànya was called to refill it with water and relight the fire. This made an interval. The fish course was removed and the jam and bread served. At this stage Milyùtine asked if they would like him to read a short poem, written in their own dialect by one of themselves—a peasant who was also a great poet.

" Yes, please," resounded from all sides.

Milyùtine drew a volume from his pocket, and opening it, began to read. He was himself of Little Russian

descent, and knew and loved the dialect; he read clearly and well. This poem described the scenery of the Dnieper and the life of the Cossacks in the olden days, free and brave as it was. The audience understood and sympathised, and were greatly excited; they begged him to read further.

"What is the poet's name?" asked one of the elder men. "Can you tell us something about him?"

"Gladly," Milyùtine answered, and gave them a short biography of Shevshènko.

They were greatly interested. "But why did we never hear of him before?" the old man questioned.

Milyùtine looked at Natasha with some embarrassment.

"It is difficult to explain," he answered; "but you know the government forbids the Little Russian speech, and says that nothing must be printed in it. Nothing is published except for private circulation, and the government does not know of it. I brought this little book because I thought you would like it, but you could not buy it yourselves, and you must not even try to. I hope the time will come when the government will allow the Little Russian speech, which is as beautiful as the Great Russian speech, to be printed and written and spoken. But we won't talk of that now. It's a sad subject. Let me read you more."

The new poem described the steppes, the long waving grass, the beautiful wild horses, and the glorious freedom. The audience, especially the men, were delighted, and an old man remarked—

"Yes! It was exactly like that. I remember it myself. I could hide in that long grass. It is all

changed now, but that is exactly what it used to be," and he began to speak of things he recollected. Milyùtine then asked if they would like to hear something from a great Russian writer. Gògol, too, had lived in that part of the country. During this conversation Melànya brought in the second samovar, and Natasha busied herself with filling the glasses again.

" Yes, yes! " they said. " We know Gògol. Natàlya Lvòvna has told us about him in her lectures. Please read something."

" I have chosen a piece from *Taràss Bùlba,*" Milyùtine said. " It is too long to read the whole poem, but I will give you one of the parts describing South Russia and the shores of the Dnieper. It is not exactly our part, but further from the sea, and the country is still more beautiful than it is here."

Milyùtine poured all his enthusiasm into the reading, and especially into the description of the old Cossack, Taràss Bùlba, and his two sons.

The audience was wild with delight, and shouted with laughter at the old Cossack's jokes till the roof rang.

By this time the candles had burnt low, and the clock struck eleven. The two old men were the first to move. They rose from their seats and said, addressing Natasha, " Time to go home. Have kept you so long, but we have enjoyed it. Thank you, Natàlya Lvòvna."

All the rest crowded round her with eager thanks, saying how happy they had been, and asking Natasha to give them more books to read like *Taràss Bùlba.*

When they were all gone, Natasha seemed wild with pleasure; her face beamed, she walked to and fro,

pressing both hands to her cheeks, kissed Tanya, shook hands with Milyùtine and thanked him. "I never heard you read so well as to-night. We never could have had such a successful evening without you. What a splendid gift to read like that."

It was late, and Milyùtine rose from his seat and was looking for his hat, but Natasha would not permit him.

"No, do not go," she said. "Let us have some tea together. We are all of us too excited to sleep just now."

He sat down and they took their tea.

"You know so well how to speak to these people," Natasha said.

"No wonder. I am one of them. My father was a poor sexton. I used to walk barefoot in the muddy streets with the peasant children. We played snowball together, and went in sledges on the Volga when it was frozen over.

"When I left the village school our priest sent me to the clerical seminary; he wished to make a pope of me, but I felt I could not agree. The old man was bitterly disappointed, but I worked night and day to reach the technical school and the university."

Then, thinking he was speaking too much of himself, which was never his custom, he abruptly changed the subject.

"But tell me, why didn't you ask the most intelligent peasants this evening. You missed them all out."

"I will ask them another time. For the first party I had to ask the parents of my children."

"You did well. You ought to have done it long ago."

Then, after a pause, " Did you hear how the deputation behaved this morning? It was almost a riot."

" Oh! no, I heard nothing. Do tell me. "

Milyùtine told her all he knew.

" I am afraid the clouds are gathering," he said in conclusion. " If we could only meet their reasonable demands and do them justice! If we could give them some compensations for all they have suffered, everything might still go smoothly. Russians are such a peace-loving nation."

On a subject like this Milyùtine felt in his element, all his shyness disappeared, and he spoke with an enthusiasm that transported the two girls.

Time flew, and when they left the school, they noticed a faint streak of light in the sky, which looked like a ray of hope.

Silently the three dark figures moved towards the house, thinking of the things so close to their hearts and of which Milyùtine had been speaking with such enthusiasm. One and the same wish united them; they longed to serve and help their beloved country, particularly its people, and to devote their young lives to that service.

CHAPTER VII

THE Russian calendar differs from that of the rest of Europe, not only by being thirteen days behind, but because it contains a great number of red-letter days. First of all come the twelve " great " holidays, then a much larger number of clerical holidays kept by the orthodox. If you add to this the holidays connected with the czar's family, and the special holidays which every private family celebrates, you will find that, for a Russian, almost every third day counts as a holiday. The lower classes, especially the peasants, and patriarchal families like the Orloffs, make a great point of celebrating all their holidays.

This particular day was a Church holiday specially popular with the rural inhabitants of Pokròvskoe. No single peasant would have dreamt of sending his children to school on such a day. Natasha and Tanya were therefore free. They were taking their simple breakfast with their mother. Orloff had left for St. Petersburg some days ago, and was not expected home for a fortnight. The two elder brothers were also away, and the family was quite small. The girls were persuading their mother to join in the picnic which they intended to hold in the afternoon. Just then the belated post in the usual grey bag was handed to Seraphìma Petròvna by Dasha, who explained that Fèdor—the servant whose business it was to take the

milk to town and bring the letters back—had met with an accident and been delayed.

No one listened to her, however, for they were eager to examine the grey bag. Only those who have lived for years in the country can quite realise what an important moment is that which brings the single post of the day. Seraphìma Petròvna was sure she would hear from her husband, and the girls expected letters from friends. But they were all disappointed. There were two newspapers and one letter; the letter had a large grey envelope which did not seem to promise anything interesting, but as Natasha glanced at the handwriting, she exclaimed joyfully, "It is from Tenkòvsky. At last! Let us hear what he says."

"Addressed to me," said Seraphìma Petròvna, somewhat puzzled. She opened the envelope and unfolded a large sheet of paper, covered from top to bottom with handwriting fine and distinct as a woman's.

Natasha was right. It was from Tenkòvsky, and, as Seraphìma Petròvna proceeded to read it, her face became very grave and sad. Natasha followed keenly the change in her expression, and tried to guess from that what the letter contained. When her mother had finished she saw the eager eyes fixed on her, but was silent.

"What does he write? What is the matter?" insisted Natasha, alarmed, and wishing to know everything at once.

"What was the use of resisting?" thought her mother. "Sooner or later she must know it," and she read the letter aloud.

The news was really bad. Tenkòvsky had been very ill; the best doctor in Odessa had diagnosed an internal complaint of so serious a nature that he advised him to go abroad to see a specialist as soon as his strength would allow. He was to go to Vienna, and intended to start the following day. It was a farewell letter, and full of kind thoughts for every member of the Orloff family; he did not forget one. It concluded, "If I ever return it will be at Pokròvskoe I shall pay my first visit."

Seraphìma Petròvna finished reading the letter, but Natasha neither moved nor spoke. Her eyebrows were drawn together with a deep furrow between, and her whole expression showed that she was thinking deeply. Suddenly, in a voice which sounded slightly hoarse but was quite firm, she said, "I saw it coming. I shall go with him."

She looked at her mother with an expression at once so determined and so pathetic that Seraphìma Petròvna could never forget it.

Seraphìma Petròvna appealed to Natasha's sense of propriety, to her sense of duty, and her love for her parents. She spoke of the great difficulty of the task, and her insufficiency for it. There was no argument she could think of which she left untried.

This dispute grieved Tanya terribly, and she said a few words in support of her mother, but Natasha had an iron will, and replied with perfect quietness and composure that she did not care in the least what people thought of her, and that her health was good; she knew how to nurse, was acquainted with several

languages, and could certainly be useful to Tenkòvsky. As for her father she would write and explain. Tenkòvsky was his dearest friend, and he would certainly understand and approve. "And you, mother dear," concluded Natasha, "you do not need me now as much as our poor old friend."

Seraphìma Petròvna realised at last that her endeavours were useless.

Notwithstanding the anxiety she felt, she could not help seeing the beauty of Natasha's unselfish courage. She also realised that Natasha perhaps needed her love and indulgence more now than ever, and she resolved to forgive and be patient.

She was silent.

The old Irina, who happened to be in the room and had overheard all that was said, was less easy to appease. The poor old nurse was beside herself with excitement; she banged the doors, dashed things down, and ran about with her white cap on one side and her grey hair in wild disorder. Casting indignant looks at both mother and daughter, she grumbled audibly that it was time for her to die, that she could not understand what went on in these days; in her time daughters had to obey their parents, and mothers knew how to make them.

"Just think of a young lady belonging to a good family going with a man—not related to her—on a journey. It could not have happened if the master had been at home." She shook her head vigorously.

When in a temper Irina Ivànovna was feared by every one in the house, and no one dared either to contradict her or to argue with her.

But to return to Natasha. She had to take the first steamer if she wished to be in time for Tenkòvsky. The news of her departure soon spread through the house; every one took an interest in it and wished to help her.

Seraphìma Petròvna and her daughters could not enjoy their meal; it passed in perfect silence, all being engrossed in their own thoughts. It was not easy for Natasha to part from her mother for an indefinite time, and her heart was full of sympathy for her. Natasha's luggage—consisting of one small box and a portmanteau —was brought down ready for the journey.

Natasha and Tanya (who was to accompany her as far as Odessa) appeared in their hats and jackets, and found the entire household assembled in the hall.

To Natasha the moment was acutely painful. After kissing her mother's hand and cheek, she went from one to another, kissing them and saying "Good-bye."

Then all, except Seraphìma Petròvna (who remained standing by the window), followed Natasha to the courtyard, where the carriage was waiting, but they stood on one side so that Seraphìma Petròvna could still see her daughter.

When Natasha and Tanya were already seated in the carriage, Irina hurriedly approached, carrying a little basket filled with all kinds of home-made sweets and dainties which she thrust into Natasha's hands. The old nurse's eyes were red with tears as she looked at her darling, saying, "God bless you, Natasha. I will take care of your mother."

" I am sure you will, dear," said Natasha, kissing her withered cheeks, wet as they were.

Natasha's last look was for her mother, who stood by the window and murmured a prayer as she saw the carriage bear her away. It rolled through the wide open gate; Urik and Sònya ran after it, waving their handkerchiefs till they lost sight of it behind the fine old willows.

CHAPTER VIII

TWENTY minutes had scarcely elapsed after Natasha's departure when Milyùtine entered by the front gate, which was still open. He walked with the quick step of a man absorbed in his own thoughts.

It was lunch time, and he came straight from the laboratory, where he had been working all morning. He was approaching the door when he was startled by Sònya's voice calling his name; he looked round and saw her running in his direction.

"Do you know what has happened?" she shouted out, and as he stopped and looked at her she told him hurriedly, stumbling over every word, all she knew of Tenkòvsky's letter and Natasha's departure.

Milyùtine stood as motionless and silent as if he were struck dumb. He looked in amazement at Sònya: her cheeks were covered with red spots, extending to the throat—a sign of great excitement with her. Milyùtine tried to grasp the meaning of what she had said. The thought that Natasha was gone—that he would not see her again for an indefinite time—was very painful.

Natasha was a girl of eleven when Milyùtine saw her for the first time. He remembered how she rushed into George's room in her short white frock. He and George were preparing for an examination in botany. She promised not to be in the way, and only asked permission to have a look at what they were examining

under the microscope. She was so bright and sweet and beautiful. He took her image into his heart then, never to part with it. All the following years, when he came again and again to Pokròvskoe and became a friend of the house, he watched her grow from a child into a woman, and his feeling for her also grew and took deep roots in his heart. The hours she used to spend in the laboratory were the happiest hours of the day for him. This sudden parting, to which was added the anxiety for his friend and master, was unbearable.

"How long is it since they left?" he got out at last.

Then consulting his watch, "Still time on horseback. Will you ask your aunt to excuse the liberty I am taking?"

He turned, and almost ran in the direction of the stables, leaving Sònya with a half-finished sentence on her lips, looking after him in astonishment.

She was still on the spot, pacing to and fro before the house, when she heard the sound of a galloping horse. It was Gontchar, Orloff's best horse, one of his own breeding, taking Milyùtine through the stable-yard on his way to the town.

In less than three-quarters of an hour, the fiery animal had covered fifteen versts. All white with foam and panting, Gontchar brought Milyùtine to the harbour; it was crowded with people and every kind of vehicle. To the deafening noise of voices was added the ringing of the steamer bell.

Leaving the horse in charge of a coachman whom he knew, Milyùtine hurried to the steamer. He did not find Natasha in the stateroom, so he made his way

through the crowd which filled the lower deck and hurried to the upper deck. As he ascended the steps he saw Natasha in her long grey dust cloak with a grey veil round her travelling hat, walking alone.

As soon as she saw him, she hurried to meet him and held out her hand.

"Oh! what a shame," she cried. "We never thought of sending a message to the laboratory! I was just regretting it, and here you are."

Milyùtine took her hand and pressed it so hard that the blood rushed to her face, but she did not utter a sound. She felt his eyes fixed on her in a way she had never known before, and saw that they expressed an honest and deep love. Natasha involuntarily dropped her head, and tried gently to free her hand.

"A drowning man grasps at a straw, Natàlya Lvòvna, and I am drowning. I know, I know you never gave me reason to hope," he said, as if answering her look, "but when we wish for something so greatly, we never cease to hope."

"I love you as I love Tanya," said Natasha, "and as I love Tenkòvsky. If it is any consolation to you, I can tell you truthfully that I do not care for any one as you wish me to care for you."

She spoke with a sincerity and sweetness that touched Milyùtine. "I shall value the friendship you give me," he said with a broken voice, pressing her hand again. The steamer bell rang for the third and last time. "Time to go. How I wish I could come with you and help you, but I must stay and do Tenkòvsky's work—it is dearer to him almost than his life."

He had to leave hurriedly, for the boat was ready to start. He ran down the steps and across the gangway without looking back, and disappeared among the crowd.

When Tanya joined her sister on the upper deck, she found her very grave and silent, and she remained so during the whole journey, which lasted eight hours, till they reached Odessa.

At Odessa they took a droshky, which brought them to the Cathedral Square, and stopped at the entrance of a small one-storied house where Tenkòvsky lived. They rang the bell, and Tenkòvsky's faithful servant appeared on the threshold. He greeted them with a mixture of kindness and embarrassment, saying, "We are packing. We leave by the six o'clock train. He is still very ill."

"Your master is at home then. Will you tell him that we won't keep him more than a few moments?"

Petro begged them to enter the hall, and disappeared. The next moment he returned, and said, "He begs you to enter," and left the door open for them. Natasha went first, and they entered the small well-known dining-room. Tenkòvsky was sitting in the middle of the room at a table covered with parcels, rolls of paper, and books. An ash-tray, a box of cigarettes, and many other objects, were scattered in great disorder.

The moment the sisters entered the room, Tenkòvsky rose to greet them, but had to hold by the table to support himself. The pallor of his face, the sad, tired look of his deep-set eyes, his worn expression and thin hands, all gave a pang to Natasha's heart, but she pulled herself together, and, smiling kindly,

approached him and begged him to be seated. He returned the smile faintly, and after shaking hands with them both sat down.

He did not express any astonishment at their sudden appearance. "You got my letter?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Natasha. "And we think you are wise to consult a specialist. We have only come to ask if you would mind my going by the same train?"

Tenkòvsky preserved the same tired, apathetic look.

"You remember how much I wished to travel?" continued Natasha. "At last I am going to Vienna. I have a friend there—our former governess—Mme. Neveu. I shall stay with her, and perhaps I may be of use to you."

Tenkòvsky still showed neither astonishment nor pleasure. "Don't your parents regret your going away?"

"Oh, yes! But I must see the world," said Natasha with an air of assumed indifference.

"And you, Tatyana Lvòvna?" asked Tenkòvsky, in the monotonous voice that was so unlike his former self.

"Oh, I have come to see Natasha off, and am going home to-morrow."

Natasha rose. "Tanya, let us go. Lev. Semènovitch must have a great deal to do."

"Petro is packing everything for me," said Tenkòvsky. "I can't do much myself. This illness has left me an invalid, and I am afraid of the journey, but there is no help for it. We must bear our fate whatever it may be!"

"Is Petro going with you?" asked Natasha.

"Yes! He would not let me go alone; he is so faithful, and very strict at times when he disapproves of what I do."

The shadow of a smile crossed Tenkòvsky's lips then, and he stood regarding Natasha attentively.

"Are you really going to Vienna to-night? What a piece of good fortune to have a friend with me." Something of his former warmth illumined his pale face.

Two hours later the Vienna express bore Natasha, Tenkòvsky, and his faithful servant away from Odessa.

A few students, Tenkòvsky's doctor, and Tanya were at the station to see them off. The doctor knew Natasha personally, and was very glad to find that his patient would have her as a fellow-passenger. He gave her valuable directions: told her how Tenkòvsky should be placed, and insisted that the patient ought to break his journey and stop for the night at least three times. Natasha said she would do the same, and the train left.

Poor Tanya's heart felt heavy as she saw her sister at the carriage window wave her last farewell.

CHAPTER IX

THE green shade of a lamp which burnt by Tenkòvsky's bed threw a livid light on his features as they rested on the white pillows. His deep-set eyes were closed, and his long bony hands, stretched over the counterpane, gave him an aspect of utter helplessness. At some distance, in the nurse's arm-chair, sat Natasha, with her eyes fixed on her patient. The book she had been reading aloud lay on her lap. She had read him to sleep, and scarcely dared to move for fear of waking him. Her young face showed very plainly signs of the harsh and sad experience she had endured in the last few weeks, and now that her friend was not watching she had no reason to dissemble.

The journey had taken over a week, and proved beyond Tenkòvsky's powers, notwithstanding the nights they had rested.

When they reached Vienna, Tenkòvsky was taken straight to Dr. Wagner's private hospital, where, thanks to his own fame and the introduction given by his doctor, he was surrounded with every attention.

The famous Dr. Wagner took a fancy to Natasha from the first moment, and gave her permission to come every day and stay in the sick-room from nine in the morning till eight at night.

The sound of footsteps outside roused Tenkòvsky from

his slumber, and his eyes fell on Natasha sitting near him with her book.

"You still here? I am glad. I must not sleep now, or what shall I do in the long night when you are not here to cheer me?"

"I wish I could stay for the night sometimes."

"That would be too much for you, Natàlya Lvòvna; you already look much thinner and very white—more like a spirit. You are a good angel to me. I can't think what I should do without you."

"I am sure you appreciate Dr. Wagner's kindness, and you have often praised Nurse Therese." Natasha spoke in that deep voice of hers which always had a shade of hoarseness.

"Yes! They are very good, but they are all strangers, and I cannot pour out my heart to them as I can to you, dear friend."

Natasha smiled with pleasure at his words. He seemed better this morning, for his sleep had refreshed him.

"With Therese there is only one topic," he went on, "and that is her Bräutigam. I know a good deal about that model young man. She has been engaged to him four years, and is willing to wait another four if necessary. They have both decided to put aside a sum of money before they marry. Aren't they sensible, these Germans? I admire them, and it is their economical temperament which makes such things possible."

"I can't say I admire it much myself," said Natasha. "But aren't we talking too much? Wouldn't you like me to go on with our story?" she said, taking up the book.

Tenkòvsky looked at her, and, without answering her question, asked, "Don't you feel homesick, Natàlya Lvòvna?"

"No, not really. Why should I? I have a letter from Pokròvskoe every other day. They are all well. Tanya does my work splendidly, and feels all the happier for being so busy. Nothing like feeling oneself useful to others." Then remembering that was hardly the thing to say to a patient, she flushed to the roots of her hair.

Tenkòvsky noticed it and smiled. "Serious words to come from such a young girl, but nevertheless as true as gold." Then, changing the subject, "You have been over a month in Vienna. Have you seen anything?"

"No, but there is plenty of time."

"Do you remember how often you have longed to see *Fidelio?* Isn't it in the repertoire at the opera? I should love you to see it. It is a unique opportunity."

"I prefer to wait till you are well and we can go together."

"You will have to wait a long time, I am afraid. I feel very weak."

"No wonder, lying in bed as you are. But you look decidedly better even in these few days."

Natasha rose to her feet. "We do not feed you properly. Do you fancy anything particular now? It is supper time."

Tenkòvsky was silent for a moment, then he said, "How Dr. Wagner amuses me sometimes. He forgets all I have studied, and how difficult it is to deceive me, for I see so clearly what is happening. This morning

he tried to prepare me for an operation which might prove necessary, as if I did not know all that. He sometimes speaks to me as if I were a child. They are naive, these Germans, even the best of them."

Natasha tried to conceal her emotion by kneeling on the floor and pretending to look for something.

"It is a pen I have dropped," she said in a singularly hoarse and weak voice.

"Take that little lamp, you can see better with it."

Natasha did as she was told, and swallowed the lump in her throat. Then, making an effort, she said, "You are the last person to be frightened by an operation! Thousands are performed every day, and people live years and years after them and are quite well and happy! The chief thing is to have confidence in your doctor. Do you trust Dr. Wagner entirely, or shall we get another opinion?"

"Oh, no! I have perfect faith in his skill. I know he will get another opinion himself if he thinks it necessary. What troubles me most is the terrible pain in my heart! It comes sometimes during the night and takes my breath. Yesterday I fainted. Poor Fräulein Therese was much alarmed!"

Natasha pressed her hands together as she crossed the room to get her basket, which stood on a table some distance away.

"Now, please, let us decide about the supper. I have brought something for you which Dr. Wagner approves of. I met him on my way and showed him."

"What is it?" asked Tenkóvsky, looking at her with an eagerness which pleased her. She uncovered the

basket and showed a dish with two divisions. "You are to have two courses—one German, which my landlady taught me, called "Sultze," the other a Russian one; it is a dish which was always prepared for invalids in Pokròvskoe."

"Well, what is it?"

"Sago, in wine."

"Have you prepared it yourself?"

"Yes."

"How did you do it?"

"Very simply! I got the best fine sago and boiled it with a little water to make it thick. I did it over a gentle fire until it got quite transparent, then I added very good claret, sufficient to colour the sago a nice clear red, then I seasoned it with a little cinnamon and fine sugar, and boiled the whole again. I can warm it for you on my little stove, or you can have it cold, whichever you prefer."

"It must be delicious," exclaimed Tenkòvsky, with an eagerness and pleasure which delighted Natasha, "I think I should like it best warm."

Next moment Natasha was on her feet with that energy and grace of movement so peculiar to her. She put on a white apron, lit a spirit-lamp, and produced from a cupboard a cup, saucer, and plate, which she washed, and soon had the preparations made for the meal. Tenkòvsky turned in his bed to follow Natasha's movements, and not one escaped him. Both were silent. Natasha was absorbed in her cooking. She stirred the contents of the saucepan without cessation to prevent burning, then, when the sago was ready, she dusted

the invalid table, covered it with a white napkin, and arranged the spoon and sugar basin so nicely and neatly that Tenkòvsky could not help exclaiming:

"No one does it as well as you."

"I am glad to do it. And now sit up, just a little." She propped two pillows behind his back. "Is it comfortable?"

"You are a born nurse, Natàlya Lvòvna."

"Take your supper quietly and I will arrange my things, as I must go soon."

Tenkòvsky obeyed and Natasha moved about the room, tidying it and filling her basket with the things which were to go home.

"But this is quite a feast," he exclaimed.

"Please eat slowly," begged Natasha.

She was delighted with her success, and forgot for a moment the cares that weighed upon her.

"When will you get your own supper, Natàlya Lvòvna?"

"Oh, when I get back, that is nine o'clock, generally."

"Do you take it all by yourself? You are not used to that!"

"I generally go to the Neveus' for supper, they are very good to me."

"I wish I knew them, I feel really grateful to them for their kindness to you. What is he like? I mean the son?"

"He is very French—a typical French student!"

"In what way?"

"I mean that he is serious, absorbed in his own subject, devoted to science, and, at the same time,

always elegant. He seems quite conscious of external things and dresses well. He shaves carefully, and his hair is parted down the middle with great exactness; in short, he looks as if he had just come from the barber. I tease him about it. A Russian student would never dream of taking such trouble with his appearance. But it does not prevent his being a very good worker. He seems to know a great deal, and when he explains things in French, notice this, that I never fail to understand. First he gave me only general ideas about chemistry, but now he demonstrates by experiments. He sometimes makes dreadful odours in poor Mme. Neveu's little room, but she, good soul, never grumbles. Antoine is her god, and what he does must be right. He has some excellent mineralogical specimens in their best room. I wish you could see his fossils from the carboniferous strata—they show such lovely impressions of ferns. He collected them in the coal mines near Lille. He tells fascinating tales of his scientific excursions when he lived in Paris as a student at the Sorbonne."

Tenkòvsky's eyes rested on Natasha with great attention as she talked, standing before the table and resting her basket on it.

"Does he often lecture like that?"

"Very often! Yesterday his lecture lasted till one o'clock in the morning, and dear old Mme. Neveu was sitting all the time in the kitchen, mending his linen. She really spoils him. And they both have to get up early in the morning. I won't stay so late again, for I reproached myself afterwards, but I enjoyed it thoroughly."

"I feel more and more interested in this Antoine Neveu," said Tenkòvsky, his eyes fixed on Natasha. "I should like to make his acquaintance."

"He said only yesterday that he wished he could know you. We must arrange it as soon as you are better."

"What is he like in appearance?"

"He is a handsome boy, has a good figure, tall, fine dark eyes with a nice expression. He is devoted to his mother, and it is a pleasure to see them together. What a pity she spoils him so!"

"In what way?"

"Oh, in all kinds of ways. She is too much his servant; she takes him his breakfast every morning in bed. That would be impossible in Russia. I told her so, and she said, "I am an old woman, and who knows how long I shall have him to myself?"

"Is he clever all round?" asked Tenkòvsky, with growing interest.

"I hardly know," replied Natasha, knitting her brows. "We speak almost exclusively of science, it is so interesting. I feel sure I shall be much more help to Milyùtine when I return. He will be astonished to find how much I have learnt."

"Where did he study? Where was he educated?"

"His mother sent him when he was twelve years old to a Jesuit school, where he lived for years."

"Well! I don't care much for Jesuit education," said Tenkòvsky.

Before Natasha had time to reply there was a gentle knock at the door, and a man entered. He was short

and of rather commonplace appearance, except for his brilliant eyes, which had a peculiar piercing expression; he wore gold spectacles, and had a trick of looking over the top; he was followed by Therese, a fair-haired young German girl, neatly dressed in a tight-fitting grey dress and white apron, with a white frilled cap on her pretty hair.

"Good evening," said the doctor. "What a lively conversation I overheard at the door." He shook his finger at Natasha, who looked distressed and blushed.

"It is the only lively conversation we have had the whole day," said Tenkòvsky. "Fräulein Orlòva wrote letters for me and read aloud and prepared a splendid supper. And as for a little talk, it takes my thoughts from myself and does me good."

"You need not apologise, dear professor. It is a good sign. How are you to-night?"

"I feel better, really better," replied Tenkòvsky; and as the doctor took hold of his dry, hot hand, Natasha gave him a farewell nod, whispered something in Therese's ear, and went off, with her bonnet and jacket in one hand and her basket in the other, light and graceful as always. Tenkòvsky looked after her till she disappeared.

A whole month passed without any remarkable change in Tenkòvsky's condition. A superficial observer would have seen none at all, but Natasha, keen-sighted through affection, saw how his face grew thinner and thinner, how its colour took a yellowish tint like wax. She noticed, too, an expression of melancholy and moods of utter weariness such as she had never seen before.

But this only redoubled her efforts to bring variety and comfort into his cheerless life. Not a morning passed but she bought fresh flowers in the market as she passed, as Tenkòvsky was a great lover of flowers, and paid great attention to these beautiful gifts.

She also tried to find cheerful books to read, and told him amusing stories she had learnt from her brothers; she was glad when she succeeded in calling the slightest smile to his face.

There were moments when Natasha felt, in spite of herself, the weight of the task she had undertaken, but she took heart, and reminded herself that she was helping her friend through a most hard and painful time.

But even Natasha's young physique and strength of will could not have borne her without her daily visits to the Neveus. They grew so accustomed to her coming that they would not sit down to supper without her. The supper was soon over, and then all three joined in clearing the table. They transformed the room into a laboratory, and Antoine's lecture and demonstration began, absorbing Natasha's attention and diverting her mind.

Mme. Neveu was fond of her former pupil, but disapproved of Natasha's exaltation, as she called it, for Tenkòvsky. She could not understand her, and tried to convince Natasha that a trained nurse would be more useful, and that she was not doing the proper thing for any one in her position. Natasha argued with her, but without success. After several fruitless attempts to convince each other they gave up the

subject, but when she saw signs of fatigue on Natasha's face she would threaten to write to her mother and tell her the whole truth.

Natasha wrote home regularly, but she always chose a happy mood and wrote cheerful letters.

Antoine did not take part in these discussions, though he shared his mother's opinion. Almost from their first meeting he very greatly admired the girl. All he had heard of Natasha from his mother was heightened by his own impressions. He had hitherto regarded women as young Frenchmen do regard them—vain, light-hearted, beautiful flowers or amusing toys. The few women students whom he had observed in the Quartier Latin in Paris had no appeal for his imagination: they seemed careless in dress and manners, and he thought them unattractive. In Natasha he found a combination of womanly grace and beauty with a man's intellect and purpose. He took a real delight in helping her scientific study. Mme. Neveu could see that her boy was deeply impressed by Natasha's personality, but she was not alarmed.

Natasha was always natural and kind, grateful for the help he so generously gave. The relation between them seemed ideal to the mother, and she was accustomed to leave the future in God's hands.

CHAPTER X

"It is simply incredible that the absence of just one person can make such a vast difference in the house! It is so dull at Pokròvskoe!" George was speaking to Milyùtine as they sat at one end of the long dining-room table, a chess board between them. They had played several games and were both tired. George had pushed the chess men aside and they lay scattered on the table.

"Yet when Natàlya Lvòvna is here you find nothing better to do than to tease her," said Milyùtine.

"There is no harm in that; it is only in fun. We understand each other very well, Natasha and I. And no wonder—it is a long acquaintance. I remember so well, I was building a house in the garden when Irina came to tell me that a little sister had arrived. I was struck by the news, and so wildly excited that I threw on the ground the small spade I was holding, flew into the house, and rushed upstairs. Next moment I was in my mother's room. She lay in her bed, and close to her on the same bed there was a bundle of white frilled clothes, and in the centre of it lay something very tiny and very pink; it was Natasha. I was fascinated by that tiny creature; she moved her limbs energetically as if trying to free herself from the burden, from all those frills and laces. I think already, that first day of her life, she loved freedom and independence. As she grew up I observed her with great interest. It was I who taught her the alphabet, and how quickly

she learnt! Then later on how she used to overwhelm me with questions. She wished to know everything, to have everything explained. When she was only twelve I explained the fundamental laws of physics in the nursery with practical demonstrations, and how eagerly she followed me, simply devouring me with her eyes, and asking such intelligent questions. It was a pleasure to teach her. When Tenkòvsky began to pay his visits to Pokròvskoe, she was not more than seven: she was not in the least shy of him, and sometimes, sitting on his knee, would ask him quite serious questions. He was fond of the child, and used to talk to her as if she were a grown-up person. He called her " my colleague " or " my friend," and she worshipped him. It was amusing to see the two together. Who could have foreseen that this little friend was to render him in the future such great and grave service! "

Milyùtine's head rested on his hand as he listened with the deepest interest, afraid to interrupt, for he could have heard him speak for hours on that topic. He knew that Natasha was George's favourite sister, that he was devoted to her, and that she loved her brother tenderly, and this made George still dearer to him.

" With all my admiration for Natasha," continued George, " I cannot help feeling that she went too far this time in her independence and contempt for conventionality. You have no idea what nonsense people are talking, and what idle stories they are telling of her in town. I am glad they have not reached mother's ears."

"Let them gossip. People like Natàlya Lvòvna will always be misunderstood and misjudged by the ordinary crowd. Let them gossip; it cannot do any harm to her in the eyes of those whose opinion she values. But I wonder how her father will take it if he happens to hear?"

"Oh, father is now so absorbed in pacifying the agitation among the peasants that he does not see or hear anything around him. I am glad he has given up the idea of summoning soldiers to Pokròvskoe, just to show the peasants what they must fear if they do not fulfil their obligations, or if they take illegal steps. Our neighbour had to let his crop rot in the fields; it was a very rainy season, and the peasants would not reap it, as they agreed."

"Horrible idea! To think that their own brothers, peasants like themselves, only in uniform, might be ordered to fire upon them. The thought of it nearly drives me mad." Milyùtine rose from his seat and paced the room in great excitement.

"Yes, it is horrible, but what would you do in a case like that of our other neighbour, when the peasants burnt his house?"

"Anything but that," said Milyùtine emphatically. "But let us drop the subject, it makes my blood boil. We never shall understand each other on that point."

Both were silent for some time.

"When did you last hear from Natàlya Lvòvna? What does she say?"

"I cannot understand her letters. Sometimes she will write whole pages about a nurse Therese, or about

Dr. Wagner, and not a single word about herself. Her letters are very queer sometimes; but she never forgets to send you kind greetings and to ask about work in the laboratory. I am glad our old governess and her son are there to keep her company in the evening. It is now five weeks since she left, and all the time she has been nursing Tenkòvsky. You know her passionate love for music; this is the first time she has been in a town with a great opera house! Well, it took Tenkòvsky a whole week to persuade her to go. Wagner's *Siegfried* was given. She was sitting in the upper circle, and when the Court Orchestra, conducted by Hans Richter, began to play, she was so overwhelmed, so carried away, that she felt as if there were no heroic deeds she could not perform. She said she had no idea there was so much power in music. In fact, that letter was like a poem. I will give it you to read if you like."

Milyùtine looked at George from under his thick eyebrows, with bent head trying to conceal the excitement he felt. George was accustomed to the fact that Natasha was admired by most of the men who came to Pokròvskoe; he counted Milyùtine among these admirers, but he had no idea how strong and deep-rooted his love was.

Milyùtine was devoted to George and very candid with him on every point but this.

"Let us have one more game before supper," said George. "You play white this time." And the two friends became silent again, bending their heads over the chess board, and were soon plunged in the intricacies of the game.

CHAPTER XI

On a bright sunny morning in the last week in October, Natasha entered Dr. Wagner's hospital with an energetic step. She was refreshed by her walk, and her face beamed with youth and health. As she passed the porter's lodge, she heard him call her and stopped. "Please, Fräulein, Herr Geheimerrath Wagner left a message for you an hour ago. He wished to write to you, but as I was giving him the paper he was summoned urgently to room number five, and he had only time to leave a verbal message."

"What is it? Tell me," Natasha said, hardly able to control her impatience.

"The Russian professor in number eight was very ill last night, and Herr Geheimerrath said you must not see him this morning."

The blood rushed to Natasha's face. "Can you tell me how he is now?"

"I can't say," the man answered, with an inquisitive glance at her. The cold indifference on his face filled Natasha's heart with bitterness. "I must see Fräulein Therese," she said, frowning and dismissing him with a wave of her hand. She turned into the corridor which led to Tenkòvsky's room. It was empty and silent. The sun shone in golden patches on the whitewashed walls and ceiling and the scrupulously clean floor with the narrow red carpet that ran the whole length of the passage.

It was all bright and cheerful, but Natasha noticed nothing and flew along.

An evil foreboding filled her heart as she reached Tenkòvsky's door. She stood and strained her ears, but could not distinguish a sound. She stared at the dark, polished door with the white No. 8.

Her mother's warning words about the gravity of her task returned to her mind. She summoned all her courage and self-control. If she were only allowed to see him! Scalding tears mounted to her eyes, but she forced them down. She longed to open the door, but dared not enter against the doctor's order. Then, as she still leaned with her back against the window-sill opposite, she saw the door move. Some one was opening it slowly, and then out of it emerged Dr. Wagner's figure.

He looked very grave, and, as his eyes met Natasha's, he approached her.

"I ought perhaps to have prepared you for the inevitable. I knew it was coming. Neither of us is needed there any more. You have been so strong, so courageous, you will have strength to bear it. Everything is finished. He died quietly this morning. Everything possible has been done. He would have had to suffer severely had he lived longer; it is better so. I would not advise you to see him now. Keep him in your memory as you have seen him alive!"

Natasha was silent.

"Can I be of any assistance to you?" he asked, looking at Natasha's pale face and quivering lips with warm sympathy.

" No, thank you. I have friends here," she said, with a trembling voice, and afraid to give way to her growing emotion, she touched the hand stretched out to her, and struggling with her tears, she went down the corridor, and out and away from the hospital.

She wished to be alone, and she walked to and fro in the streets of Vienna, not knowing where she was going.

A hundred questions agitated her mind. " How can so much wisdom, so much goodness,perish in a moment? " she asked herself, and bitter revolt filled her heart, but she answered her own question. " No, no! they have not perished! The best of him will live in science, in me, in all those who had the happiness of knowing and loving him."

CHAPTER XII

FIVE days had passed since Tenkòvsky had been buried in one of the remote cemeteries of Vienna. It was a fresh bright morning, and the platform of the East station was crowded with passengers and bustling people. In ten minutes the Odessa express would start.

Neveu, followed by his mother and Natasha, hurriedly approached, making their way with difficulty through the crowd. They were carrying Natasha's small luggage: Antoine had the heaviest package—the portmanteau, Mme. Neveu the travelling-bag, and a basket with sandwiches and fruit. Only an umbrella and a beautiful bunch of violets, Antoine's gift, were left for Natasha. She wore her plain grey travelling dress and looked very pale. There were signs of great suffering and fatigue on her beautiful face. All her usual fresh, bright colour had disappeared, her step was less buoyant. A long grey veil of crêpe de chine fell from behind her hat, and was wound round her throat, forming a grey cloud round the expressive, serious face. The little group reached the train. Antoine found a second-class carriage, a " non-smoker," and, placing Natasha's luggage in it, rejoined the two ladies on the platform.

" I wonder if I am doing right in allowing you to travel all alone, exhausted as you are," said Mme. Neveu, with a grave look at Natasha.

"Do stay another week! Just one week, one, and we will find you a fellow-traveller, or your brother can come for you. Just say the word and I will take your luggage out. The ticket will be all right—you can use it a week later." Antoine spoke hastily and with a pleading voice.

"I must go, and the sooner the better! I could not stay here any longer. It is impossible to explain in letters. I must tell them everything at home. The journey will do me good. There is nothing the matter with me, except fatigue."

Antoine's expression changed: he looked annoyed and flushed. "I would lock you in if you were my sister," he exclaimed. "Perhaps I do not understand Russian customs, but it would be impossible for a French girl to travel alone so far."

"But I am not a French girl," said Natasha reprovingly, but with a faint smile. "Oh, nonsense! don't let our last minutes be spoilt. I shall never forget all you have both done for me in these last dreadful days, and all the time I have been in Vienna. You must come to Pokròvskoe this summer. All my people will be kind to you and make you welcome in our dear home."

"Take your seat, dear child. It is time. God bless you," said Mme. Neveu. She put her arm round Natasha's waist and kissed her, first on the right cheek and then on the left, in French fashion. Natasha returned the kisses warmly, then shook Antoine's hand and sprang into the carriage. The door was shut by the guard, and the train moved away, to Antoine's

great regret. "We shall miss you dreadfully; take care of yourself!" were the last words Natasha heard from him.

Mother and son stood on the platform, looking at the pretty grey figure and answering Natasha's farewell waving till the train disappeared.

Natasha was glad to be alone, quite alone, and not obliged to talk. She sat in a corner of the carriage with her eyes closed.

Picture after picture passed through her mind; her journey with Tenkòvsky to Vienna, her hopes of bringing him back restored, the nursing in the hospital, and his death, her long walk in the Prater, all by herself, when she had left him dead.

She recalled the small chapel in the cemetery, the coffin covered with black velvet, the rays of the sun tinged by the stained glass windows, how they illumined the coffin!

She remembered how, when the organ played at the close of the funeral service, the music seemed to come from Heaven itself; it softened her heart, and made her think how Tenkòvsky had loved music and everything beautiful.

Then she recalled the churchyard, with its cold, heavy monuments, the fierce wind blowing, bending the cypresses to the ground; they seemed to bow to the little procession as it advanced towards the grave.

The regular swaying of the railway carriage rocked Natasha to sleep, and her recollections passed from reality to dreams; she still sat in her corner, but she was fast asleep.

From her childhood, Natasha's sound sleep had been remarked in the family; if she happened to fall asleep when sitting on her chair she had always to be carried to bed, she slept so soundly. The carriage jolted and the engine whistled. Time flew, but Natasha heard nothing. An hour passed; the train, approaching a station, began to slow down, and stopped. The door opened, and a stout lady entered the carriage. She carried a number of parcels of all imaginable sizes, baskets and bags, and was helped by a small grey-looking man. He was evidently deaf, for the lady had to shout loudly to him as he busied himself arranging the luggage opposite Natasha.

Natasha woke and saw the two embracing, uttering all kinds of endearments, as if they were oblivious of her presence. Then the man sprang out, the door was locked behind him, and the train started. The stout lady sat down with a sigh opposite Natasha, and began to scrutinise her inquisitively. The girl bore the incivility as well as she could, and, after some time, the stranger addressed her.

"Are you travelling alone?"

"Yes."

"Where are you going?"

"To Odessa."

"As far as that, all alone?"

"Yes."

"Have you no one to accompany you?" Natasha was silent.

"Are you married?"

"No."

"You have no one to take care of you? You look young." Natasha was again silent.

"Where did you begin your journey?"

"At Vienna."

"What an expensive undertaking! Can you afford it? Your parents are well off, then?"

Poor Natasha had scarcely time to answer the questions, they followed each other so rapidly, but she did her best to reply, not wishing to be rude.

"You don't look at all well," continued the talkative lady—she was a German—"Is anything the matter with you?" Then, before Natasha had time to answer, "What is your age? Twenty-three or twenty-four, I should guess. Russian girls study too much—I suppose you are one—you look anæmic."

She opened her bag and produced a parcel, neatly folded in paper, and a flask of white wine; she unwrapped the parcel and offered its contents to Natasha. "Home made bread," she said, "Ham! Butter! Everything fresh! Take something. Judging by your looks I should say you had had no food for days. A love trouble, perhaps; life is hard sometimes."

Natasha felt bewildered, but she saw that the broad red face was very kind. "Do take something! Have some of the wine. It is our own make. My husband has a large farm and vineyard close by here. You will not refuse me? Come, do me the pleasure. I had a daughter of your age. She was a beauty, but I lost her in a few days from diphtheria."

Tears rose to the stout lady's eyes. Natasha's heart softened and she felt sympathy.

A minute later, a white napkin was spread on Natasha's lap and she partook of the refreshments, and her companion—saying she had had nothing since morning—joined in.

After that, she made Natasha lie down at full length on the seat, with a pillow under her head and a shawl round her feet. She had evidently taken a great fancy to her, and Natasha, who had been annoyed at first by her intrusive manner, now really appreciated her kindness. It did her good to have some one taking care of her.

Frau Fischer was going to see a sister who lived near the Russian frontier, and they travelled the whole day together. Before nightfall, Natasha knew all Frau Fischer's romance, learnt how Herr Fischer liked his coffee prepared, and all Frau Fischer's home duties, anxieties, the number of her relations, and all that concerned her closely. Frau Fischer's manner of speech was amusing and lively, and it was a rest for Natasha to be distracted from her own thoughts and to enter into other interests.

By the time they reached Frau Fischer's destination, Natasha had to promise her new friend that she would come and visit her whenever she happened to be in her neighbourhood.

This kind woman's company and a good night's rest completely restored her; she felt her old self again, and her active nature began to protest against her long confinement in the carriage; she was impatient to reach home and see her dear ones, and her impatience increased as they drew near to the Russian

frontier. Here it was at last! The train stopped at Volotchisk, where a horde of Russian porter peasants belonging to the neighbourhood, dressed in long red blouses with belts round their waists and wearing high boots, invaded the carriage to take Natasha's luggage to the Customs. Natasha felt so intense a pleasure on seeing these simple fellow-countrymen that she longed to shake hands with each one and say something kind; she smiled in the friendliest way on a fair long-haired man who, after a struggle with the rest, took possession of her luggage and conducted her to the inspection room. As they were making their way through the crowd, he said to her, " I see you are happy to be in Russia again: it is not good to be abroad a long time! "

Natasha nodded assent, and pressed a rouble in his hand; he took off his cap and smiled a broad smile, showing his two rows of white teeth.

The revision passed smoothly, except that all her books were kept back with the promise to forward them shortly. Her passport was viséd and found in order. Next moment she was shown to the restaurant, where she took her place at a table crowded with delicious Russian savouries and hot and cold dishes. In the centre a bright copper samovar of huge dimensions was boiling and singing, and gave the whole place a comfortable home-like character. Natasha enjoyed glass after glass of the fragrant Russian tea, with lemon and without, listened to her mother-tongue around her, and thgouht what a blessing it was to be again in Russia, to sympathise with people and understand them so well.

The ensuing day—the last of her journey—passed

quickly, for Natasha, besides talking to interesting fellow-travellers, was occupied in looking eagerly out of the window at the great plains with the poor villages scattered over them. She watched the peasants—the women with their bright red kerchiefs, skirts and aprons, and the men in their high fur caps and wide trousers. Everything seemed dear to her, and she felt that she belonged to this country and nowhere else. And though the train moved more slowly and stopped often, this last day seemed to pass much more rapidly and pleasantly. As soon as they reached Odessa, Natasha went to the harbour and took the steamer, which brought her in eight hours to Nikolàeff. Nobody knew she was coming and nobody met her, but she hired a droshky and promised the driver double-fare. Now that only an hour's drive remained, her impatience grew almost unbearable; she spoke to the driver, coaxed him, and appealed to his pride, and begged him to make haste.

At last the carriage ascended the so-called "Great Hill," and there appeared the whole panorama of Pokròvskoe. Natasha involuntarily rose to her feet to get a better view of the scenes she loved so well. "They are there," she thought, "under those green roofs! They don't know yet how near I am." She shaded her eyes from the sun to see better the trees round the house, the river glistening before it, and the village extending along the banks. The church with its golden cross stood beyond the village on a small hill, with the churchyard round it. How beautiful all these familiar places seemed on so bright a morning!

The carriage descended the hill and entered an avenue of old willows. The road lay over a swamp and was bordered thickly on both sides with reeds. Though autumn, the day was so warm that the frogs croaked loudly just as they do in spring or summer, and the high reeds, growing between the willows, were still green and formed a wall on either side; in them lived numerous creatures that made mysterious sounds.

The carriage came to the end of the willow avenue, crossed a narrow bridge over the river, and turned by the large orchard into the open gate of Pokròvskoe House.

Barbòs, the faithful shepherd dog, met it with his imposing bark, and Pilad, hearing him, sprang from the terrace and joined in with a sonorous voice.

"Pilad," called Natasha, and in a moment, her pet recognised her and leapt straight into the carriage. He barked joyfully, wagged his tail and licked her face.

CHAPTER XIII

ATTRACTED by the sound of the approaching carriage and by the barking of the dogs, Urik, who was preparing his lessons at the dining-room table, rushed to the window.

No sooner did he recognise his sister than he shouted at the top of his voice,—

"Natasha! Natasha has come!"

His shrill voice penetrated every corner of the house, and the news of the arrival passed from room to room like wild-fire, and everybody rushed to the hall.

Seraphìma Petròvna, who was praying for Natasha in her room, rose in great excitement and hurriedly descended.

Lev. Baltazàrovitch and Milyùtine, who were shut up in the study, discussing the results of last week's work in the laboratory, hurried out, banging the door behind them.

The elder boys rushed from the house shouting "Hurrah!"

Several servants, wishing to welcome their young mistress, hurried into the hall from different doors, and when Natasha entered, the place was crowded.

She was accompanied by Tanya, who had seen her sister from the window of her room, and had flown across the yard and reached her before she was out of the carriage.

Seraphìma Petròvna, speechless and pale, was the first to take Natasha in her arms.

Natasha then passed from one to another. While George embraced her, she felt her hands taken from behind, pressed by some one, and turning round saw Milyùtine.

Amid the general excitement, he could not avoid expressing the intense joy he felt at the sight of Natasha. Not a word passed between them, but words were not needed; they would only belittle all Natasha read in his clear, honest eyes; they held a whole ocean of deep and noble and beautiful feeling. Natasha answered warmly the pressure of his large strong hands, and felt, as she never had felt before, how much his love meant to her.

Then some one else took her hat off, another her jacket, she was patted on the back. Every one talked, made remarks, asked questions until all voices were drowned by their father, who shouted, " Careful, be careful, or you will tear her in pieces! "

The sight of all these dear faces and the sound of their voices filled Natasha's heart with happiness, but it made her think of Tenkòvsky, and she grieved in the midst of her joy.

As she wondered how she could break the sad news to them, Tanya, as if guessing her thoughts, whispered gently, " We know everything. Dr. Wagner wrote to our doctor and he wrote to father."

Natasha felt this a relief. No one mentioned Tenkòvsky's name, or asked any questions concerning him, and she appreciated their thoughtfulness.

"She must be tired. Let her sit down at least, and give her some dinner," said her father.

The old nurse made her way to her, kissed her, and led her into the dining-room, but all the nurse's persuasions could not induce Natasha to take any food.

"Not a morsel just now, please," Natasha said.

"Oh, do have a glass of tea," said Irina. "The samovar is boiling in the kitchen. I suppose they gave you dreadful stuff instead of tea?"

"No! Not even tea!" insisted Natasha. "Let me realise first that I am at home."

She passed from room to room, caressed the cat, Mashka, lying in its favourite place in an arm-chair, and patted Pilad, who would not for a moment desert her.

She went into the kitchen to greet those servants who had not been able to come to the hall, and was met everywhere by friendly faces, for every one was glad to see her back. She received every possible sign of affection.

The news of her arrival spread outside, and before an hour was past the old priest — Father Peter — came, carrying a consecrated loaf in his shaking hands. He blessed Natasha solemnly, and then gave her the bread, expressing his delight at seeing her safely back.

"We have prayed for you in your absence," he said, "and yesterday we had a service for our deceased friend. Was he interred in a Christian manner?"

When he was satisfied on that point, he changed the subject out of consideration for Natasha.

He declined to stay for supper, but when Tanya came, bringing a bright little tray with a glass and a bottle

of light Crimean claret, he willingly accepted some, filled the glass to its brim, and drank it, after silently and reverently crossing it three times. He thanked Tanya with evident pleasure, and she left the bottle and the glass on the table.

Father Peter firmly believed in the existence of the devil. He often spoke of him and often suspected his presence. Anything black or dark, like black coffee or claret, suggested the Evil One to him, and the only sure remedy that he knew against him was the sign of the Cross.

"I am a sinner," he said, looking at Tanya with his kind blue eyes, "I cannot resist temptation. When my wife Agafia Vasilievna dies, I shall go to the Aphon Monastery and end my life there. The Aphon monks are great ascetics and saints, and their example will help me to conquer bodily desires."

Part of Father Peter's prophecy came true. Agafia Vasilievna, though a strong woman and much the younger of the two, did die before her husband, but Father Peter did not retire to the monastery; he remained in Pokròvskoe to a good old age, enjoying comfortable living between the fasts, though he kept the latter very strictly till his death.

Before leaving, he told Seraphìma Petròvna that he would return the following morning to celebrate a thanksgiving service for Natasha's return. The mother thanked him gratefully, and they parted with the kind old priest in the friendliest way.

It was not till after supper, when the children were in bed, that Natasha told her parents and Tanya the long

sad story of Tenkòvsky's illness and death. It was in her mother's room. The parents sat, each in a corner of the sofa, and Tanya was in the background and quite still; Natasha sat on a footstool near her parents, her hands clasped round her knees. She told everything just as it happened. The room was almost dark, lit only by a tiny oil lamp, which burned before the eikons in the holy corner.

Natasha proceeded with her narrative in her low, deep voice, and no one interrupted.

Seraphìma Petròvna's eyes were fixed on her child; only at times they wandered from her to the holy images, and her lips moved, thanking God for having restored her.

A short pause ensued.

"It is an irreparable loss: no one can ever fill his place," said Lev. Baltazàrovitch, mournfully. "He was a great man and a dear friend."

Then, after a while, he resumed—"I am glad that you, my dear daughter, should have helped him in his darkest hours. I can't deny that. But why did you hide the truth? Why didn't you tell us everything when you wrote? Your mother was terribly anxious all the time, and afraid of something; it is impossible to deceive a mother. But I believed you! Otherwise I should have left everything, however urgent, and joined you in Vienna!"

Natasha rose. "I hate untruths, father," she said, vehemently, "and there was not one word of untruth in my letters—not one. I did not say what I thought unnecessary, and that is all. I knew you would have

come, and I did not want mother to be left without you. I knew all the anxiety it would have given."

"But, at least, you could have consulted me, and as for anxiety, your mother could not have suffered more than she has done. She sent the coachman to town for news two or three times every day, often four times. We were most uncomfortable. But you have always wanted your own way, Natasha. When will you learn to trust the judgment of your elders?"

"Do not scold her," interrupted her mother. "Let us thank God for sending her back. It might have ended so differently."

"Precisely! And now let us go to bed."

"You will sleep well at last," he said, addressing his wife.

Then, as if sorry for his scolding, he gave Natasha the usual benediction, and pressed a tender kiss on her forehead.

The two girls left the room together.

As they crossed the front garden to the outbuilding where their rooms were, they saw George and Milyùtine sitting on a bench in front of the house. They were smoking cigarettes and looking silently on the silver surface of the river, lit up by the moon.

"Come, sit down here," called George to them. "Isn't the night glorious, too glorious for sleep!"

The girls obeyed: they approached the garden seat. Milyùtine got up to make room for them.

The four friends were silent for some time. Every one had much to think of, and no one liked to break the silence of the beautiful night. It was almost as bright as

day, and the white church of the convent, with its golden crosses, on the opposite side of the river, seemed quite close at hand. The perfect stillness was now broken by the church bell striking twelve. Then the dogs barked in the village, a cock crowed loudly, and all was calm again.

"Are you very tired, Natasha?" asked George.

"Not in the least, I could not sleep now. You have both been Tenkòvsky's pupils for years—have you thought how you could best keep his memory alive?"

"We were speaking about it the very day the news of his death arrived, and Milyùtine has already written scores of letters to former pupils and friends; funds must be raised first of all. We think of establishing a Scholarship bearing his name, and awarded to the best pupil of the government school in our district; but we must have a meeting to arrange it."

"Tenkòvsky has admirers all over Russia. A subscription list ought to be opened in one of the best papers," said Milyùtine.

And the young friends got more and more enthusiastic in drawing up scheme after scheme, discussing how they would work to get the money for the Tenkòvsky's fund, and how it could be used.

Sometimes they spoke all four together, and then Tanya hushed them, afraid to waken the dogs sleeping in the yard. Time flew during these conversations. The first pale pink light of the rising sun was already colouring the white clouds on the transparent sky.

"Don't get up before ten or eleven. Give yourself a good rest," said George, as he shook Natasha's hand in

parting with her. "Look at Tanya," he continued, "is she not going to recite or make a speech?"

Tanya stood with her face turned to the sky. She smiled. "I won't recite, but I think it a shame to go to bed when Nature is so beautiful. We ought to see this morning-sky every day. Let us take advantage of the opportunity."

"What about a boat on the river?" asked Natasha.

"Excellent idea!" exclaimed George.

Next moment they were in the boat, Milyùtine at the oars, Natasha at the rudder, advancing on the smooth surface of the river, singing one of their favourite Russian songs about Mother Volga.

Milyùtine did not go to bed on that memorable night. After the boating party, when the rest retired to bed, he walked up and down the old alley in the orchard by the river. He thought of Natasha. Would she ever love him as he would like her to love him? He thought of the necessity of soon leaving Pokròvskoe, now that his work was almost finished, and he determined to apply for the post of teacher of chemistry at the agricultural school a few miles from Pokròvskoe.

CHAPTER XIV

THE winter which followed was a very quiet one for Pokròvskoe. They all had their hands full. Lev. Baltazàrovitch took advantage of the quiet time to make a catalogue of the archæological treasures he had collected during his last summer's excavations, and his daughters and Sònya helped him.

Nicolas worked at an oil painting which he intended for the annual South Russia Exhibition in Odessa.

George was preparing his B.Sc. dissertation, hoping to take his degree in Odessa next spring.

The mother divided her time between the house, the village, and the church. Her large workbasket was full of mending, and she never allowed herself to indulge in reading or playing patience until all the young people had gone to bed.

Natasha, helped by Tanya, threw herself heart and soul into work for the peasants.

Milyùtine was very busy concluding the scientific work started by Tenkòvsky. Their experiments were successfully accomplished and all the notes had to be arranged for publication.

After a day of hard work, the family would meet round the dining-room table, and listen to Nicolas as he read some Russian classic with fine elocution.

Every one had his or her own aims and interests, and nobody complained that winter in the country was

monotonous. Beautiful sunsets, wonderful moonlight nights, walks and drives over the vast snow-covered plains, sledging on the river with its sheet of thick transparent ice—all these gave ample variety and so much enjoyment that they did not feel the absence of distractions.

Weeks and months passed swiftly in this busy, earnest life, Pokròvskoe and the village forming for the time a little world in themselves.

The only windows, as Natasha called them, which brought light and knowledge from the great outside world, were Antoine Neveu's frequent letters.

Though living in the gay city of Vienna, he was absorbed in his laboratory and his research, which necessitated frequent visits to scientific libraries, for he followed up everything in his subject. His letters had a soothing effect upon her; she gave him a close account of her scientific reading, and sometimes asked his advice. He sent books from Vienna, and the correspondence between them grew more and more active.

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Spring was at the door! No one could doubt that! The golden rays of the sun had gained a new energy and warmth; everything revived, and the fetters of the long frost were broken!

The snow on the vast plains thawed rapidly: here and there, from under the white shroud, the earth reappeared in black patches; softened by the thawing snow, it exhaled a peculiar fragrance which had an intoxicating effect on every living thing. Even the clumsy black crows seemed to be under the spell: their

cawing as they crossed the steppes on their way to the woods had acquired almost a merry sound. Innumerable streamlets from the melting snow descended the slopes, rippling as they came, and joined the great river in the valley, helping to demolish the ice on its surface. Large pieces of ice, bluish-white and transparent, were floating on the river and moving slowly downwards, to the great delight of the peasant children who were playing on the shore. They did not seem to mind the cold stones under their muddy bare feet, but ran about and threw stones on the ice, helping to break it into smaller fragments, amid peals of happy laughter. Every day brought new birds of passage from the South, and busy life stirred everywhere.

The sparrows, which had been in possession of the starlings' houses during the winter, were not chivalrous enough to welcome the new-comers and return them what was theirs; they considered them intruders, and protested energetically. Fierce battles ensued, and generally concluded by the starlings, who had the advantage in size and strength, regaining their rights and settling in the comfortable little wooden houses fixed for them on the branches of acacia and other trees. There were several on the trees in Pokròvskoe front garden, also in the gardens of the priest and deacon, and on the trees growing round the better cottages in the village.

The village consisted of two rows of thatched cottages with whitewashed walls, forming one wide, muddy street, and the return of spring was felt here as it was everywhere else; the peasant families deserted their

narrow stuffy rooms where they spent the winter, the poorest of them in company with their pigs and calves. The tiny windows were fastened all the year through with clay and putty; but now the doors were opened wide, the inhabitants could live in the yard and street with their animals, or sit out on the clay bank which surrounded the house. This bank was about two feet high, and formed a comfortable seat where, in their leisure time, they would sit for hours eating sunflower seeds.

Natasha had many friends among the cottagers in the long muddy street; she knew well what their cares and sorrows were, she sympathised and helped and understood them, and they trusted her and often asked her assistance in their relations with Orloff. She was a real favourite with the villagers, was the god-mother of quite a number of children in the village; she nursed and advised in case of illness, and taught their children, and in many ways entered into the private life of the peasants.

Milyùtine knew everything concerning her interests in the village, and was her helper and adviser. Natasha's parents only partly knew about her activity among the peasants. When alone with her father, Natasha often turned the conversation to the life of the village-community and their relations to him, and did it with great tact and fine taste. Orloff believed in the clear intellect of his daughter; he knew her generous heart, he also knew what a favourite she was with the villagers, and that they would confide to her what they would never dream of telling him. He knew that only the

highest motives guided her when she took upon herself the rôle of peasant-advocate. He therefore listened with a good-will to all she told him and esteemed her counsel. It was thanks to her repeated prayers and entreaties that he had dismissed the unpopular agent, Fedòtoff, and had engaged a new one who understood better how to deal with the peasants. It was also due to her passionate entreaties that he lowered the rents of the fields; this was a great relief to the peasants, and helped to restore a better understanding between the villagers and Orloff.

This good feeling was strengthened by the news of peasants on other estates being severely punished by flogging and imprisonment for raising disturbances. Pokròvskoe remained quiet and peaceful ever since the unpleasant occurrence in the courtyard of Orloff's house.

Natasha was now occupied with a plan of her own, namely, to join together the greatest family-festival of the year—that of Orloff's name-day—with a treat she wished to give to the villagers. She took Milyùtine, George, and Tanya into her confidence. They worked out the plan together, and decided to give a performance of Gògol's comedy, "The Marriage." All the members of Orloff's family took a keen interest in the coming event. Nicolas laid his work aside and busied himself with the scenery and decorations. The girls prepared the costumes. The old nurse, helped by Dasha, made a drop-curtain of material brought from town. But more than any one, it wasMilyùtine who had his hands full. Being an excellent carpenter, he worked

hard at the arrangement of the stage. He worked indefatigably in the capacity of carpenter, manager, organiser, actor. Every one came to him for help or advice, and he put his whole heart and soul into the preparations for the entertainment. The prospect of giving pleasure to the villagers filled his heart with joy.

In order to give every one in the village a chance, it was decided by Orloff that the women and children should be invited to the dress-rehearsal, and the men to the evening performance. The distillery was filled with benches right to the entrance doors.

Seraphìma Petròvna was busy making preparations to receive a great number of guests. The folding bedsteads had to be examined and prepared, and the large schoolroom was transformed into a bedroom for the younger gentlemen; the elderly ones were provided with small spare rooms. The young ladies were to have the lecture-room. Extra beds were placed in the girls' rooms.

The servants worked with pleasure, for they, too, looked forward to the play.

Dasha offered her best dress and apron to Sònya, who was to take the part of a servant.

Nicolas, who possessed a real dramatic gift, was stage-manager, and had to take the chief rôle.

The next best part was taken by the family doctor, who came from town for the rehearsals.

No time was to be lost, as less than two weeks remained.

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The long expected evening arrived, and the old dis-

tillery—for years dark and silent—presented a new aspect. From its numerous square windows, ranged in three rows on the façade, a bright light streamed and broke the darkness of the quiet meadows. This light was intensified by a great number of oil lamps placed round the building at regular intervals. Two lamp-posts stood in front, and the round space before the building had been carefully swept and strewn with sand. A crowd of young villagers waited at the entrance, trying to get a glimpse through the open doors.

The guests were beginning to arrive, some on foot, others in vehicles. Orloff's carriages were bringing the family and their friends. Milyùtine, who had nothing to do during the first act, received them. He took their tickets and showed them to their seats. Perfect order prevailed. The villagers in their Sunday clothes, their hair abundantly oiled and perfectly combed, looked grave and dignified; it seemed as if they were eager to show that their behaviour entitled them to associate in this way with their master and his friends. The improvised orchestra consisted of an upright piano, a harmonium, two violins, one 'cello, and a flute. The players took their seats ready to begin; they were all old friends. George sat in a regular prompter's box fixed before the stage, studying the book which lay open before him. His moustaches were fastened up by strips of paper, so that they would not interrupt his voice when he prompted. He repeatedly sent messengers to the green-room to ask if they were ready. The actors were greatly excited; two hairdressers in different corners of the room were completing their

tasks, and a pile of wigs of different kinds lay on a small table.

Natasha, a red kerchief on her smoothly parted hair, her face aged by a number of wrinkles artistically drawn by the skilful Nicolas, was to play the part of a match-maker. She could hardly be recognised in her attire, which represented a common middle-class woman. Tanya, in a large elaborate bonnet, an old-fashioned silk dress, her hair powdered grey, was to play the part of an old aunt. These two were having a final rehearsal in a corner.

Sònya, who had been helping her cousins, looked through the hole in the stage curtain, and urged them to be quick. They were ready at last, and the orchestra played a pot-pourri out of " A Life for the Czar " by Glinka.

A short pause ensued, and Dasha and Pasha, the two housemaids, drew the curtain up and the play began. It was Gògol's famous play, " The Marriage," so popular in Russia, representing Russian middle-class society between the thirties and the forties. The play had been carefully rehearsed, and the chief parts were acted with real skill. The young actors had put their hearts into their work. During the first scene, it was only the occupants of the first rows, filled with the Orloffs and their friends, who applauded; but when the match-maker appeared, and the conversation between her and the hero—the bridegroom—began, roars of laughter arose, which increased when several suitors presented themselves. The enthusiasm reached its climax when the cowardly hero, afraid of the responsibilities of

marriage, escaped at the last moment by jumping through the window.

A few loud comments and remarks were heard from the back rows where the villagers sat. There could be no doubt that every one present enjoyed the performance, greatly to the satisfaction of the actors and Orloff: the latter was glad of this opportunity of drawing nearer to his villagers, and it helped to restore the good feeling which had existed for several generations between the peasants and his family.

CHAPTER XV

THE play was over. The family and their guests were conveyed home in different carriages.

Orloff's house was gorgeously illuminated, especially the entertaining rooms on the ground floor. The music-room, the large and the small drawing-rooms, and the library, which formed one brilliant suite, had their doors opened wide, and the guests moved freely from room to room between the dances.

The dancing was in the music-room, and the grand piano was played by a skilled "tapeur." Groups of people—servants from the kitchen and peasants from the village—were standing outside, some under the trees and some quite close to the windows, but all watching.

No blinds or curtains hid what was going on. The sound of many voices, high pitched and deep, resembling the hum of bees, reached the crowd even through the closed windows. To have a better view, some climbed on the trees.

Grisha, the driver of the water cart, a slim youth in a red blouse, was among them. "Grandfather Peman!" he shouted, addressing an old watchman who stood among a group of villagers a little to one side, "I did not see you at the play!"

"Some one had to stay and take care of the house. There was not a single living soul in the place," replied

the old man, leaning on his stick and looking at the windows.

"Well! It was your loss, old man. It was something to be remembered. All acted well, but no one like Master Nicolas—he beat everybody. You would not have recognised him with his dark whiskers and bald head. How in the world did he arrange it? It was wonderful. He had my topboots on, and he would not have them polished."

"Grisha looked at his boots and not at the play," remarked Efrocỳnia, the laundress, the belle of the kitchen, who was very popular among the servants.

"Hold your tongue, will you! I know the play nearly by heart. Natàlya Lvòvna read it to us one Sunday this winter, and she gave it me afterwards to read myself. It is Gògol's play: he wrote 'Taràss Bùlba' too."

"Now let us alone with your learning, Grisha! Just look here."

The "tapeur" was playing a mazurka.

"Look at the master! He is dancing too."

"Why shouldn't he? It's a master's business, and he is not too old," remarked Peman. "I remember him as a boy, the old mistress was living then—he was a mischief!"

"Look! Look at the man in the centre! Isn't he mad! What does he shout for? and how he waves his arms! Isn't he red? He must have taken too much."

"I wonder the master lets him behave like that!" said Peman.

"Avancez! Reculez! Les dames en avant!" shouted the excited leader, and all obeyed.

" Isn't he a fool? " exclaimed Grisha. " He shouts as if his life depended on it."

" He dances with Tatyana Lvòvna! She has her hair quite grey."

" It is with powder," said Efrocynia. " She took the part of the old aunt. I wish she had left the large cap on, she looked exactly like the late old mistress."

" What are they doing now? They will fall down if they go on like that."

" It is for pleasure," explained the kitchen maid.

" A strange pleasure," grumbled Peman, " We can't keep the dogs from barking if they go on like that."

" Don't bother about the dogs," said Grisha. " People are so busy they won't hear anything. You needn't watch the house to-night. Leave your rattle alone. They will keep it up till daylight."

" They haven't to work to-morrow," said the kitchen maid.

" Well! It is their way and it is their own business," said the old coachman, who had served Orloff from childhood and disliked the free ways of the younger generation.

" Grisha! Ah, Grisha! Where are you? Come here, you are wanted! " shouted the cook from the kitchen. " Where are you all? Supper is ready "

"Let her wait! She orders us about too much," grumbled Grisha still in the top of the acacia.

As he spoke, footsteps were audible from behind; all turned and saw the elegant dark figure of a young man disappear in the garden.

" Who was it? " asked Fedor, the cowkeeper.

"Oh, it was the young Frenchman," replied Grisha. "I had a bother with his queer lace boots—a strange leather, they would not polish like the others. He arrived by the steamer yesterday when every one was asleep, and when I opened the door for him he could not say one word in Russian and could not understand a word of what I was saying. A queer fellow! He came from abroad—a long way, Natàlya Lvòvna said."

"Are you all deaf?" shouted the cook's voice again, "the samovar will boil away."

"Let her shout. It will do her good, the old witch," said Grisha. "Was it not our Miss Natàlya Lvòvna who passed behind there?" he asked.

No one had seen her. One by one the servants went to the kitchen, and, following their example, the villagers too made their way home, and the spectators diminished as night advanced.

Some distance away a lively conversation was being carried on between Antoine Neveu and Natasha as they walked to and fro in the garden.

"You should not have left the dancing," said Antoine.

"I wanted to see what you were doing. You must be bored to death, not knowing Russian!"

"I have been bored, especially during the play, I won't deny that, but I could not see that you cared."

"But what could I do? You saw how busy I was. It is most unfortunate that you should come at such a time when the house is all upset, and no one knows exactly where they are."

"Well! I know one thing, which is that your sister, Mlle. Tanya, who had to act also, could find time to

stay with me and show me any amount of kindness. She is really good and hospitable."

"And I am not? Well! Every one knows that Tanya is very kind, and no one better than I; but that is no reason why you should accuse me unjustly. Tanya had only a small part, and my part was one of the chief. I naturally felt the responsibility, and was afraid of spoiling the play, and I had to study my part and rehearse. I am glad it is over. Now! Look here! We have already begun to quarrel. Your mother was right when she said that if we were half an hour alone without our hands full of work, we should be sure to quarrel, and it is your fault. You always begin!"

"That may be, but I stick to my opinion that, in spite of all these guests and your own acting, you might have shown me a little more attention when your sister, who hardly knows me, did so much to entertain. There is some family likeness between you, but she is a better edition."

"What nonsense you talk! I shan't be jealous of Tanya. But what did she do?"

"Oh! all kinds of things. First of all, she explained to a stupid-looking servant how he was to make me comfortable in my room, then she saw that I got a good breakfast and showed me all over the house, she took me to the garden, and when I was interested in the church which I saw in the distance, and said that I had never been inside a Russian church, she took me and explained many things. She seems to be religious. Why, she even found time to give me a short lesson in Russian. She wrote on a slip of paper all kinds of

simple Russian words and their pronunciation and whole sentences. I shall keep the list, as it may be very useful on my way back. I saw her yesterday for the first time, and I feel as if I had known her all my life. And how pretty she is! I feel she might become very dangerous to me."

"What a chatterbox you are to-night," said Natasha, smiling. "That is all right, but it's a pity you must go to-morrow, and I shall not have time to show you any kindness myself." She spoke jestingly. "Couldn't you stay a day or two longer?"

"It is quite impossible! I came to Odessa on business for our firm, and I must return as was arranged. I only had these two days for myself. I should not like to neglect the firm's wishes in any way, as I am leaving them soon."

A short pause ensued.

"How pleased your mother must be to return to Paris, the old home."

"Yes! she is delighted. She told me that I must ask you to come and see her soon. Will you? Do come. She will have a room for you. Your sister could perhaps join you. Is she as much interested in science as you are?"

"Yes. But not quite in the same way. I care more for natural science, and she for literature and languages and philosophy."

"What clever girls you Russians are! Well! she will find enough to interest her in Paris. If you arrange to come in May and stay a few months, I will promise to help you with organic chemistry. It is difficult, and

you cannot get the slightest notion without laboratory work. I know you want to study medicine later; you told me so. Well! you can't begin better than by a good knowledge of chemistry and physics. Then you can study anatomy, psychology, and the rest. A few months of practical work will teach you more than a whole year of study with books only. I can introduce you into a private laboratory."

"Oh! that would be too delightful," exclaimed Natasha, carried away by an enthusiasm which flushed her cheeks. "You must thank your mother! If only it were possible!" and she pressed her hands to her cheeks. "It would be a real joy to work in a laboratory in Paris. The thirst for knowledge I feel sometimes is so overwhelming that I could leave everything behind me to have the chance of studying."

Antoine looked at her admiringly, but remained silent.

"You must not tell any one of my plans," she continued; "no one knows anything but Tanya. The fact is that mother will be terribly against my studying medicine. I sounded her and I know. She thinks that it would kill me. But she is mistaken, my darling mother! Was she kind to you?" Natasha asked after a pause.

"Very! She thanked me for what my mother and I did for you in Vienna. I could see from what she said that you had greatly exaggerated everything; that is part of your nature!"

"Not at all! I only say exactly what I think and feel. But I'm chilly. It's too cold. Let us go in."

"Yes! And I am sure you are missed. Let us go!"

They entered the hall and passed into the music-room. After the freshness of the garden, the air in the room seemed suffocatingly hot and even stifling.

" Let us go in the next room. It's too crowded here," Natasha suggested. But that was not an easy task, for a crowd of ladies and gentlemen were massed round the dancers.

Though sorry to attract attention to herself, Natasha was obliged to cross the large room on her way to the door. Antoine followed close behind, also uncomfortable, and they advanced slowly and carefully to avoid collision with the dancers. The " tapeur " was playing with well-marked rhythm and great ' entrain ' Strauss's beautiful waltz, " Wein, Weib, and Gesang." His playing electrified the dancers, and they moved in harmony to the wonderful music. One couple seemed quite carried away, and nearly flew towards Natasha and Antoine, so that they had to stop and let them pass.

A tall well-built man of about thirty, with his arm tightly clasped round Tanya's waist, was sweeping her along the smooth inlaid floor as if she were a feather. Tanya, in her white muslin dress, looked a mere child, and her face showed intense pleasure, which she did not attempt to conceal. To avoid the touch of her partner's waving fair beard, she turned her head a little aside, and her luminous grey eyes met her sister's and Antoine's. She smiled to them both and soon disappeared in the crowd.

" Who is that? " asked Antoine.

" A college friend of Nicolas, Lawyer Polyànsky: we all know him well."

She had scarcely spoken when the stout figure of a young man suddenly emerged as if from under the ground. He bowed awkwardly before her, bending his massive figure a little to one side. "One round, please. You have not danced with me to-night."

"Not now! Later, if you like," said Natasha. The round-faced youth bashfully retired amid jostling and pushing.

"Poor fellow!" murmured Antoine, sarcastically.

A waiter carrying above his head a tray with ices crossed their path, making supernatural efforts to reach the ladies who had ordered them, and balancing his tray sometimes with one hand and sometimes with both.

Natasha was already near the door when Antoine's attention was excited by an officer in a tight uniform with gold epaulets on his shoulders; his reddish hair stood out on his head, his spurs clinked, and he danced with a pale timid-looking girl a head taller than himself; she looked down all the time, and her partner kept her at some distance. Their movements were somewhat unsteady. A sudden turn came in the dance, another couple collided with them, and, before any one knew what had happened, an old lady who was watching the dancers suddenly disappeared beneath a white cloud of frilled skirts. His partner's unlucky fall filled the young officer with dismay. He flushed deeply and murmured repeatedly, "Pardon, mille pardon," and then carried off his partner amid the good-natured laughter of all present, in which the old lady joined.

"At last we are here," said Natasha entering the

half-empty drawing-room, which held only a group of spectators by the door.

"We deserve some refreshments after our successful pilgrimage," she remarked, and approached the long table by the wall, which was covered with a great variety of sweets, candies, fruits, and delicacies of all kinds. A large number of candles and flowers gave a gay aspect to the whole.

She offered different things to Antoine, but he said he had had a good supper an hour or so before, and refused everything but a glass of orchade (a delicious drink prepared from sweet almonds).

They sat down in two comfortable chairs in a corner where they could watch the dance.

"I cannot understand how people can enjoy this," said Antoine, looking annoyed.

"Dancing is a pleasure you must experience yourself before you can appreciate it properly. Were you taught to dance as a child?"

"How could I be? My parents were much too poor. Didn't I tell you that my father worked on the railway? He used to come home late at night, dead tired, and my mother was always teaching in the house. Those were my first impressions. There was no time for dancing lessons and no money to pay for them," he said, bitterly. "But thanks to my mother's wonderful energy and ambition she succeeded in gaining a good knowledge of her mother tongue and managed to earn enough money to give me a fair education."

"If you call your education only fair, what would you call mine?" asked Natasha.

"I am not speaking of chemistry, but of general education—first in a primary school, then in a Jesuit school. I didn't learn much there, but they taught me one useful thing—to be on my guard with people and not to trust them. How few there are in the world one really can trust! I give no one but my mother my full confidence. The world is full of treachery and injustice."

Natasha looked at him with compassion. "Your childhood was not what it ought to have been," she said. "Childhood ought to be happy."

"Well, mine certainly was not. I was often very lonely and I scarcely ever had any children to play with. I was always hearing of our poverty and saw how mother tried to conceal it. She denied herself proper food to buy a nice suit for me, and would take me on Sunday to walk with her and father on the boulevards. Life has been a struggle for us all, and as for the future, *je ne suis pas un veinard.* I don't expect much happiness. One has to be born happy."

"Oh, what nonsense you are talking. If you begin with such ideas, you may ruin your life. To believe in one's own good fortune is the first step to success, and it will enable you to take from life whatever it has of good and beautiful."

"You were born in opulence. You have had everything you wanted. It is easy for you to have rosy views."

"But," Natasha protested, "you speak as if all our happiness depended on material circumstances."

"So it does! One can get everything with money!"

"What a materialist you are. Or else you say it just to annoy me. No! you cannot get everything with money. You cannot buy the best."

"May I have my promised dance?" asked the stout young man, suddenly re-appearing. "I have been looking for you everywhere."

Natasha rose reluctantly, but went with her partner, and Antoine followed them to see the dancing. He had a complete view of the whole room and, as he watched, he singled out Natasha's figure moving among the crowd. "No one," he thought, "not even Tanya, can be compared with her in natural grace. How she holds her head! Character, strong will, in every movement!"

He stood and looked at her, his beautifully-shaped head with its dark short hair leaning against the wall; his large dark eyes were half closed, his oval face with its olive complexion was serious and pale; his hand was very small for a man, and he twisted his moustache. There was much of his race in the young French pessimist; how unlike the people who surrounded him he was! He seemed like a dark cloud in a clear sky.

In the opposite corner of the large dancing hall there stood the broad, strong figure of Milyùtine. He had been working very hard for the last few weeks, and it had told even on his strong physique. He was leaning against the wall looking at the dancers, and particularly at Natasha. He had followed her with his eyes for some time, and did not feel the least uneasiness or envy at the kindness she was showing to the Frenchman—he was a guest and what could be more natural

than to show him some attention? Besides, what could there be in common between a Natasha and this elegant man with the sad, sallow face? Natasha had introduced him to Milyùtine, but with his small knowledge of French he could not attempt a conversation, and therefore kept aloof, neither did he feel drawn to him.

No sooner was Natasha seated than another partner approached to claim her, then a third and a fourth.

Antoine still stood by the door and thought, "What nonsense this dancing is. How immoral to be embraced like that by a stranger. How can any one so clever and proud enjoy it? After all, she is no better than the rest!"

It was plain that Natasha did enjoy dancing: her pleasure was written clearly on her beautiful face. As she waltzed past Milyùtine, she looked at him and said, "Have pity on the stranger."

Milyùtine understood what she meant, and, obedient to her request, immediately made his way to reach the further end of the hall where Antoine stood. In his hurry he stepped awkwardly on people's feet and on ladies' dresses, until he reached Antoine, and, blushing, addressed him in his broken French.

The kind, open face of Milyùtine and his awkwardness amused and pleased Antoine, and the two soon plunged into a conversation which, although not fluent, soon grew interesting to both.

The music for the quadrille began, and the couples took their places opposite one another, close beside the two men, whose conversation turned on chemistry, and soon grew lively.

Lawyer Polyansky and Tanya were also engaged in an animated conversation and appeared to take no notice of any one else present.

"Could you decipher my handwriting?" Polyansky asked.

"It took me some time, but I enjoyed reading it. You are very clever, Ivan Iakovlevitch. I thought so the first time I heard you give that wonderful speech in our drawing-room. Do you remember? We were all present. You spoke of the rights of man with such eloquence that it was like music to me!"

"A Russian woman loves eloquence — our great novelist Turgenieff says so; but when I wrote that letter, I did not want to show you my eloquence, but something quite different. Why don't you answer the main question? Wasn't all my eloquence powerful enough to change your decision?"

"I have nothing more to tell you."

"Don't you feel that I love you with all my heart and would give my life for you?"

"I too love you as I never loved any one before, but I could not promise anything except to be your sister and feel sure we could be happy together."

"Dear Tatyana Lvòvna, you speak like a child! What you ask is impossible."

"Why?" said Tanya, lifting her innocent, serious eyes to the lawyer.

He looked at her for a few seconds. "Yes, you are a child! A beautiful child! We could be so happy together, but you must trust me. Don't you understand that, if I wish to give my life, my whole life, to

you, I also expect you to give yourself, soul and body!"

"The best of me—my soul—I can give, but my body —neither to you nor to any one."

"That is the result of this unnatural religious teaching," he whispered, stamping the floor impetuously.

"Ivan Iakovlevitch! Tatyana Lvòvna! Your turn!" shouted the couple *vis à vis*. They were startled. In a moment they were dancing in silence the quiet graceful figure of the quadrille.

Two hours later, daylight broke in and put an end to the long ball. Some of the guests had already left. The elderly guests and members of Orloff's family had gone to bed, but the young people were still enjoying themselves.

The music room with its dusty floor and stifling air was left empty: all passed into the great clean dining-room where a huge bright samovar sang its morning song. Large earthenware jugs of cream, others with fresh milk, plates with butter, slices of lemon, and baskets with home-made rolls stood on the table, inviting the guests to sit down to a good breakfast before they started for Nikolàeff.

There was lively chatter and many voices speaking together with occasional peals of laughter; the bright room was filled with happiness. How well the fragrant tea tasted after such a night! How beautiful were the first pink rays of the rising sun!

Through the open windows the sounds of wakening nature were audible, the crowing of cocks, the singing of birds, and the chattering of many ducklings in the farmyard.

" How happy they all are," thought Antoine, as he took a glass of tea from Tanya's hand.

" You must learn to dance, you must learn to speak Russian, and come again. You will soon grow young and happy here," she said, as if she read his thoughts.

" And with all that, I should not be as happy as you! "

" Why not? "

" I have not the talent for it," he said.

Half an hour later, Orloff's carriage departed with cheerful greetings and waving of handkerchiefs, taking Antoine with it.

In the evening of the same day it was Milyùtine who was obliged to take leave of the people with whom he had lived so happily for years. He was appointed teacher at the Agricultural College some miles away from Pokròvskoe, and had to commence work there. Every one was sorry to part with him, especially his intimate friends George, Natasha, and Tanya; and he had to promise them to come to Pokròvskoe as often as his work would permit.

CHAPTER XVI

Two days had passed since the great festivities at Pokrôvskoe. All the guests were gone. Pokrôvskoe seemed quite deserted and very quiet after the unusual animation of the last few weeks.

One fine morning the Orloff family were all assembled round the breakfast table. Fresh newspapers had just arrived and every one eagerly seized them. After some dispute Nicolas took possession of the latest and was soon absorbed.

"This is good news for me," he exclaimed a minute later. Several eyes were turned on him.

"Just think! A whole room of the art department will be devoted to Fortuni's pictures. You remember I told you about the great Spanish painter. He is little known because all his pictures are in the possession of the Spanish grandees, but now they are all sending their treasures to the Paris Exhibition. It is a unique opportunity. I have longed for years to see them, I can now make a proper study of him. I am going to Paris, that is settled—and soon. Will any one come with me?" Nicolas glanced round the table, his eyes brilliant with joy. A pause followed; then Natasha said, "I had an invitation from the Neveus to visit the exhibition and stay with them. It came only a few days ago, but I did not mention it because I knew mother would not let me go alone, but now

that Nicolas is going to Paris you won't say 'No,' mamie dear. It is a unique opportunity for me too, and I have saved all the money father gave me for my birthday present; I have enough to pay for my journey."

Seraphìma Petròvna looked alarmed. "You wish to go away again, Natasha? What will you do in Paris? Nicolas will be busy."

"I shall have to stay at least six weeks in Paris, Natasha, you must remember."

"I am not going to enjoy myself, it is not sight seeing, not even the exhibition that I want, but work. Antoine Neveu has promised to arrange some practical work in organic chemistry in his laboratory. When will such another chance come again? It is a splendid piece of luck, I should really be sorry to lose it."

Natasha's face was flushed and she looked pleadingly at her father.

"My deal girlie, you wish to become a regular blue stocking, a *femme savante par excellence*," said Lev. Baltazàrovitch. "But I leave it to your mother; try to settle it with her; I have people waiting for me," and he left the dining-room.

One by one they all went away except Natasha and her mother, who were engaged in an animated discussion. Finally the mother gave her consent, and it was settled that Natasha should accompany her brother to Paris.

One week later brother and sister were already in Paris; they occupied three furnished rooms in the Rue Gracieuse.

Though sharing the sitting-room which separated

their bedrooms, the two hardly saw each other; they had different occupations all day, and even their meals were taken separately.

Helped by Antoine, Natasha drew up a plan of work, following lectures and working in the laboratory. In order to have long days at her disposal, she generally got up at six, and, while dressing, she would watch from her windows the workpeople who passed daily. First there were the rag-pickers (*chiffoniers*) returning from their nightly searches, carrying in bags behind them all they had found in the deserted streets of Paris. She would see them turn the corner and disappear in the narrow Rue Moufetard, their home. She took a great interest in their bent figures, their eyes always cast on the ground. They lighted their way by mysterious little lamps on their breasts and fished up skilfully with a long stick, spiked at the end, all they happened to see on the pavements.

"Marchand! Marchand d'habit," sang a voice in drawling accents as another figure passed while Natasha was hurriedly doing her hair.

"Du mourron! Du mourron pour les petits oiseaux," sang a woman's voice, each one having its own time.

Natasha was dressed by now, and she tidied her room and prepared her simple breakfast. To simplify matters, she always made coffee for three days in advance, and had only to mix it and warm it up over a spirit lamp.

"Voilà le repailleur! le repailleur," sang a man's voice, a sign that time was passing.

Natasha swallowed the contents of her cup and turned

swiftly the page of the notebook she was consulting during her breakfast.

"Oh, dear me," said Natasha, seizing her hat and jacket and putting them on as she hurried downstairs. She went to the university, beaming with youth, energy, and delight, happy to be in Paris and do work she loved so dearly.

In the lecture room she was one of the first to arrive; she took her seat on the bench near the professor and listened, trying not to lose a word. The eagerness she showed, her intelligent face, her plain dress and hat, marked her out, and the professor seemed to feel that she was specially interested, and, among the whole large audience, addressed himself mainly to her.

If there were time between the lectures, she would go to the Sorbonne Library, or visit the Geological or Zoological Museums and study the collections, either with the aid of a catalogue or with the aid of her own book. The afternoon she spent in a laboratory with Antoine Neveu, and these hours were perhaps the most enjoyable in the whole day. She had a table at her own disposal and always kept several different experiments in progress. She wore a blue cotton blouse over her dress, her face was the embodiment of eagerness and gravity, and she was afraid of wasting a single moment. Neveu was the chief demonstrator, and his hands were always full; he had the business of the laboratory, his own research, and he had also to help a few students who were there, but he always found plenty of time to give Natasha, and followed her progress with real interest. Here in the laboratory, amid all

these bottles, glasses, balances, etc., dressed in an old suit, a blue cap on his head, he looked happy and very handsome; his hands moved with extraordinary skill and agility, and he often whistled some French air with an accuracy that showed a good musical ear.

It was here that Natasha learned to admire him most. She appreciated his help very greatly, and, as time went on, felt a warm friendship for him and a strong desire to repay him for all he had done. When he came to see her on Sunday, as he often did, he produced a quite different impression; he wore a Sunday suit, a top hat, a silk necktie (*foulard*), lemon-coloured gloves, and a small bunch of violets in his button-hole. They sat opposite to each other, and Nicolas was usually there. Natasha tried her best to be kind and hospitable, but their conversation never became interesting, and there was always a certain strain which they each felt, and which made Antoine unhappy, or even irritated him so that he would spring to his feet and pace up and down the room, and the visit would end with one of his pessimistic outbreaks. In these outbreaks he found fault with everybody, called himself a failure, an unhappy wretch who had no future before him, who earned only enough to keep him from starvation, and would never be able to do original work, while stupid fellows got all the chances and were sure to make *une carriere brillante.*

To Natasha's sunny nature these scenes appeared like nightmares; she thought him weak-willed, at once ambitious and inconsistent, but she pitied him greatly and longed to help him. And the next day they were

again two comrades in perfect harmony, bending over a balance or filtration, or so keenly interested in the results of some analysis that the whole world seemed for them to be concentrated in a small layer of white powder on the filter. And Natasha involuntarily compared the serene beautiful face with the face she had seen the day before—aged, yellow, and miserable—and acknowledged to herself that she could not understand him. The longing to cure him of these attacks of pessimism took deeper and deeper root in her kind heart.

Six weeks passed in this way; the two worked together and were continually in each other's society, possessed by the same passionate enthusiasm. It was time for Nicolas to return, but Natasha was not ready, and wrote home imploring that she might remain another month or two; it was agreed that she should, and Tanya was to join her and see Paris and they could then return together.

That was the situation when an important event occurred. Natasha was quite clear about her own feeling for Antoine Neveu: she admired him as a man of great knowledge, talent, and skill; she was fascinated by his enthusiasm for science, and valued his help. She felt herself deeply indebted to him, but she realised that he had a most unhappy nature of a kind she had never met before: she had great compassion for him, but certainly no love. He, on his side, had all along been strongly attracted by Natasha's beauty and charm; his feeling soon passed from admiration to love, but not seeing any sign of the same feeling in her, he care-

fully avoided showing his affection, but he hoped with all his heart that she would learn to love him. Accustomed as she was to comradeship with men, Natasha was perfectly unconscious of his feeling.

Week after week passed and Tanya's arrival was deferred. The two young people still met every Sunday, either in the Rue Gracieuse or in Mme. Neveu's rooms. Antoine followed the same policy; he was patient and reserved, waiting for a change in Natasha. But no change came.

One day he had a fit of unusually strong depression; these always made him irritable, and he entered Natasha's room, his face pale. Holding out her hand, she asked sympathetically how he was, for she saw he did not look well. He cried in excited tones, "Don't speak as if you cared whether I'm ill or not! You are a cold, indifferent woman. You do not care that" (showing her the end of his finger) "for me. I am mad, mad with love for you, and you are as blind as a bat and as cold as ice. You are cruel!"

He rushed out of the room and downstairs, and did not return. Poor Natasha felt as if she were turned to stone; she did not move from her place, but hid her face in her hands, feeling humiliated and miserable. A moment later, a wave of pity for Antoine filled her heart and swallowed up all other feelings. She was glad that he did not return, for she wished to be alone. At that moment the concierge knocked at the door and handed her a telegram announcing Tanya's arrival for that same day. It was a real blessing for Natasha, for she had to prepare her sister's room and then

hasten out to meet her. While she busied herself, she murmured, " How blind I have been! Everything is spoiled, everything! " and " Poor, poor fellow! what shall I do? "

Tanya's arrival greatly cheered her; she brought all kinds of news from home, and diverted Natasha's thoughts. The latter did not confide in Tanya for she felt as yet too utterly bewildered, and her feelings were so mingled she could not bear to speak of them. Tanya found her sister changed, restless, and tired, and thought her overworked. She begged her to rest for a few days, and Natasha agreed, as she wanted to collect her thoughts before meeting Antoine Neveu. And how nice it was to have Tanya with her!

Natasha's absence made Antoine feel furious, and he grew thin and yellow. Several days passed and Natasha neither came nor wrote. At length he could bear it no longer. On Sunday he came and rang the bell. He was greatly relieved when Tanya opened the door, for she gave him a cordial welcome, and both he and Natasha were glad to have some one with them. Natasha was grieved when she saw the change in him. Tanya left them alone for a few moments, and Antoine approached her, pressed her hand, and said, " You must excuse the mad scene you witnessed, but I have been silent for so long and I can bear it no more. I love you with all my heart and soul. I shall lose my reason if you don't love me."

" But what can I do? " said Natasha, her eyes filled with tears.

" Try to love me; we can be so happy if you will. I

will do my utmost to make you happy. I can teach you to love me. I have never loved any one as I love you."

Tanya returned to the room, perfectly unconscious of what had passed between them, and the rest of the evening was spent quietly.

Tanya promised to go and see Antoine's mother the next day, and declared that she found Natasha overworked and unlike herself, so that she would not permit her to go to the laboratory for a few days more.

CHAPTER XVII

NATASHA took her sister round Paris and showed her the most interesting sights. The shock she had received made her feel unable to resume work at once, and she was glad of an interval.

She met Antoine at his mother's house and in her own rooms: he took advantage of every moment they were alone to speak of his great love, and how impossible life would be for him without her. He made no more scenes, he was kind and gentle, and his pale thin face showed how intense his feeling genuinely was.

Natasha grew more and more serious; she realised the gravity of her position; she questioned her own heart, but always found the same reply—she did not love Antoine, but felt for him only friendship and pity.

Time passed. Antoine had only one wish, one idea; all his life was consecrated in that—to marry Natasha. Being much in her society and remembering her self-sacrifice for the old professor in Vienna, he felt that compassion was the strongest thing in her nature, and that she could be conquered by this if by nothing else. Antoine really loved her in his own way as much as he could love any one, and it was not hard to persuade her that his life would be ruined without her, that her presence would give him the strength and light he needed. Sympathy and friendship she already had,

and love, he assured her, would follow, for he would do everything to win it.

Natasha grew silent and grave. She thought the matter over and over, but she did not wish to consult any one; she was, as always, self-reliant, and felt that she ought to fight out the whole poignant situation in her own way.

"I do not love any one else," she argued to herself. "Perhaps I am not able to: I may be too cold by nature to be happy. Then why not make some one else happy? Perhaps I may transform this 'splendid creature'" (so she often called Antoine) "from an unhappy pessimist into a bright, happy man."

She sympathised with him so deeply and really believed that she could bring him happiness, but she hardly believed that he could teach her how to love.

One Sunday afternoon Tanya went to the Russian church. Natasha was alone when Antoine came; he brought her a big bunch of violets and also a book which he wished to give her. It had been a gift from his professor: it was made up of biographies of the chief French chemists, and beautifully bound and illustrated. Natasha had admired it greatly, so he brought it for her. She knew how much he treasured it and was touched at his wishing to give it. He looked young and handsome: he was in a sunny mood and delighted to find Natasha alone. He pressed the book upon her; she declined at first, but he insisted, and then began a passionate declaration of love. Natasha's heart sank, but she listened. He told how terrible his life had been before he met her, how more than terrible it would be

without her, and told her in a quiet but resolved voice that he had made up his mind to end himself if she would not be his wife. Natasha was conquered. That heroic self-sacrifice which was her chief characteristic was awakened, and she promised to be his wife if he would be patient and not expect too much at the beginning.

He promised everything, beamed with tenderness, and pressed repeated kisses on her little cold hand. He looked radiant and Natasha was happy to see it. They were both young—Antoine was two years younger than she—and they neither of them knew much of life.

An hour later, when Tanya returned, she found her sister on the balcony, looking into the street with her arms on the balustrade. Tanya approached her and was beginning to tell her of the people she had seen in the church, when she was startled by Natasha's deep voice, which sounded deeper than usual. Natasha did not look at her, but continued to gaze into the street. She said abruptly, "Tanya! I must tell you something. You may have guessed it already. I am going to marry Antoine Neveu!"

Tanya felt as if she had been struck a blow on the head. She was quite unprepared, and a few seconds passed before she could speak.

"Didn't you think of it?" continued Natasha.

"No, never! Not once! Poor Milyùtine! He is one of the best men I know. It will be a terrible grief for him. It is a blow to me, too. I feel as if I were losing you, Natasha."

"Oh, you must not think that, darling!" exclaimed

Natasha, impetuously; then, as if resuming control of herself, she said, "You like him — Antoine Neveu? You have often said so, and he is full of admiration for you. Can't you come and live with us?"

"Oh, no, dear! That wouldn't do," said Tanya, seriously. "No third person ought to live with a young couple. You are not mistaken about my opinion of him. I do think him a good, honest fellow, and I like him, but how will father and mother take this? Let us go for a long walk together. I need it. My head feels hot."

Natasha was quickly ready and the two went out. They soon reached the beautiful Jardin des Plantes, and walked up and down the wide chestnut allé.

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Antoine begged and implored Natasha to marry him as soon as possible, and in the end persuaded her that it was best for them both. She had never approved of long engagements and she consented. She wrote home, explaining everything as well as she could, and asked her parents' blessing on the great step she desired to take. The letter was affectionate, but quite resolute in tone.

She was quite aware that her family would prefer her to marry a Russian and some one in her own position, but she knew that Antoine had produced a very favourable impression on them all, and that they would not make any serious objection, the more so as Mme. Neveu had, years ago, told them all about her son.

Natasha's parents knew how useless it was to contend against her when she was determined on any course,

and made very few difficulties. They gave their blessing and offered to help her in every way.

Natasha had money of her own, not much, but enough to have lived upon in simple fashion, but Antoine was too proud to support himself on his wife's money; so it was settled that they should go to Russia, where he should try and obtain a post as chemist in a sugar factory; he might become a director, then they would save as much as they could, return to Paris, and live a simple life, he working at his research and Natasha helping him.

Natasha certainly had had other plans: she had meant to become a doctor and devote herself to the Russian peasants, but she was willing to give up anything now in her passion for self-sacrifice.

There were no factories of any kind near Pokròvskoe, and scarcely any in the whole district, but Orloff had business relations with influential people in Kieff, the chief manufacturing district in Russia. He wrote to his friends, and soon found a situation as chemist for his future son-in-law.

CHAPTER XVIII

THIS was the last day on which Mme. Neveu had her son Antoine under her roof. The thought brought tears to her faded blue eyes, and she struggled courageously not to give way, but at times the tears rolled down her cheeks, and then she redoubled her work in the little parterre lodging. She polished and rubbed and swept and washed and tidied her best room, and from time to time peeped into the bedroom where Antoine still lay in bed, though it was after ten, enjoying his breakfast —a large bowl of chocolate carefully prepared and served by his mother. Papers, letters, and an open portfolio were lying on the bed and on the pillows. He was arranging his papers, and when he missed anything, begged his mother to hand it to him, and she willingly obeyed, pressing each time a kiss upon his cheek.

There was nothing in the world Mme. Neveu liked so well as to serve Antoine, and he knew it and responded by a strong affection, mingled with an unconscious feeling of superiority and patronage. How could it be otherwise when he had always been brought up as the pride and hope and centre of the family?

"Isn't he handsome? Isn't he clever? He can do everything," his mother would say to her friends, even in his presence.

Mme. Neveu would have preferred to have him

altogether to herself this last day, but knowing that he could not bear to be a whole day without seeing his bride, she had asked the sisters to share their dinner and spend the last night in their house.

The two sisters lived several miles away from the Neveus and quite at the opposite end of Paris, and as the church where the marriage ceremony was to be performed was close to the Neveus' house, it was arranged that Antoine should spend the night at his aunt's, so as to make room for the girls.

At six o'clock the girls arrived, and were cordially received at the door by Mme. Neveu. Antoine helped the girls to take off their jackets.

The round table in the best room was all ready, and the dinner prepared by Mme. Neveu.

Soon after the girls arrived, M. Neveu returned from his work. He did not share his wife's anxiety for their son's future, and took upon himself to entertain the little party.

When all were seated at the table, he filled their glasses and urged them to take wine. He then told them stories of Antoine's childhood, which they had heard many times already and knew by heart; but this time he was not interrupted, as he usually was, by his wife or son, as they were all absorbed in their own thoughts and glad not to have to talk.

Mme. Neveu was, as usual, cook and waitress, and did not like to be helped.

Natasha and Tanya praised her cooking and hospitality: they both felt the greatest sympathy with her, for they knew what an effort it must have cost her to prepare

all these dainties on a day when her heart could not be in her work.

The dinner and dessert lasted so long that it was ten o'clock when Mme. Neveu cleared the table, leaving the wine-glasses. Seeing signs of fatigue on his mother's face, and on Natasha's, Antoine suggested that they should all go to bed. They agreed. Natasha and Tanya had the room belonging to their host and hostess. A large double-bed with a dark red baldaquin occupied almost the whole space, and a small lamp burnt dimly on the table.

A strange feeling of ill-omen filled Tanya's heart as she watched her sister. She had never seen Natasha as she was now: her slow movements as she undressed, and her absent look which seemed to glide over the surface of everything. Tanya's heart felt heavy, but she kept it to herself: she undressed and crept under the counterpane in silence.

Natasha was very slow this evening. The lamp had burnt out and the room was in darkness: the two girls lay motionless, each at her own side of the bed.

The sounds in the house became fewer and fewer, and an hour later perfect stillness reigned, except for the ticking of the old clock in the adjoining room.

Natasha was lying with wide-open eyes and counting the strokes of the clock: it was two. She could bear it no longer.

"Tanya! are you asleep?"

"No. Not yet."

"Not yet? But you have not moved! I thought you were sleeping soundly."

" No, I could not! "

" Why? "

" I don't know."

There was a pause. Tanya felt Natasha approach her, and a moment later she heard her whisper very softly—

" Tanya! I don't love him. I never did! "

Tanya felt as if she had been struck on the head: all the blood rushed to her brain, and she sat up suddenly, though she could not find her voice for some moments.

" Does he know? " she asked, trembling all over.

" He knows."

" You have told him you don't love him? "

" Yes."

" And he? "

" He said I should learn to love him in time. He could not live without me! "

" But this is madness! It is impossible. You will both be wretched! "

" I told him so. I told him repeatedly and almost in those words. I struggled hard. I tried my best to persuade him, but it was of no use. If you had seen how he suffered when I refused him, you would understand why I gave way at last, and agreed."

" It is not too late. It is never too late to correct such terrible mistakes! " Tanya was on her feet as she spoke. " Be brave! get up quickly! Dress! Let us run away! " Tanya hardly knew what she was saying in her excitement.

" Hush, Tanya! " Natasha's voice was very firm. " It is too late. I know him better than you do. It

would break his heart if I did it now. I ought not to have said so much, but I felt so miserable. I so wanted your sympathy: it was like a last struggle. It is over now, and I feel myself again. He is not strong, Tanya! If I broke my promise now, all the disappointment and the scandal and the shame would kill him. He would think it a most terrible injury! All the uncles and aunts in the Quartier! How they would fall upon him. Oh, it is too late! too late! "

Natasha broke down in a long convulsive sob which shook her from head to foot. She felt Tanya's soft arms around her neck, and the sisters spent the rest of the night in a close embrace until the first rays of grey light entered the window of their room.

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No one but Tanya represented the Orloffs at Natasha's marriage. Antoine's parents, his uncle and aunt, represented his.

As it happened, the ceremony had to be celebrated three times, first in the Catholic church, the Neveus being Catholics, then — to satisfy the Orloffs — at a Russian church, and, finally, in accordance with the law of the French Republic of which Antoine was a citizen, in the Mairie of the district.

Antoine, in his best black suit, his face radiant with happiness, looked exceedingly handsome. He was so absorbed in his own joy that he did not seem to notice the expression of stony resignation which often crossed Natasha's face.

She and Tanya were very silent and did as they were told: they moved mechanically all the time. Mme.

Neveu fully realised the importance of the step her darling was taking, and was too full of her own anxieties to notice anything strange in the sisters. Tanya felt as if a great wrong were being done to Natasha and she felt very bitter towards Antoine and his people.

After the third ceremony a light luncheon was taken, and the young couple were accompanied to the East Station and started on their long journey to Russia.

Tanya left Paris a few days later to return to Pokròvskoe.

CHAPTER XIX

THE sugar factory where Antoine Neveu was to work as chief chemist was situated amid beautiful forests, oak woods and beech woods stretching for miles.

Close by the factory was a small house which had been assigned to the chemist as a lodging. The house was in poor condition, servants were scarce and very primitive, and Natasha had to do her work herself. She was skilful in housekeeping, but did not like it; however, she threw herself into the work and performed it zealously. In some ways it was an advantage, for it helped her to bear her present life.

Natasha had never imagined what she was bringing upon herself in marrying a man whom she did not really love; she was far too sensitive a nature not to suffer keenly, and had done so even in the first days of her married life. The marriage, however, had been made, and Natasha determined to take her courage in both hands and do her utmost to make her husband happy; but this was a most difficult task to carry out. She had thought she knew him well when she married him, but she soon found out that she was mistaken.

Antoine had not those qualities which make a man easy to live with. His mother's adoration and service had developed in him great self-confidence, and also a desire to rule. The Jesuit school had not taught him to trust people, to respect their views, or try to understand them. He readily condemned people who did

not share his opinions, and, although naturally generous, he could make any one living under the same roof with him very miserable.

No two people could have been educated in ways more unlike. Natasha had grown up on the Russian steppes in free communion with nature; her family and friends were people of culture; she believed in equality between men and women, and from her childhood had been strongly independent. Her mother often told the following tale as characteristic of Natasha. When she was nine years old she was once reading the Bible to her mother, and when she came to the place where Jesus says, " If any one smite you upon the right cheek turn to him the left also," she stopped, and turning to her mother, said with emphasis, " I shan't do that." " You mustn't presume to correct the words of our Lord," her mother exclaimed, but Natasha answered, " I am sorry to grieve you, mother, but I will not do that," and she pointed to the line again. " I will not be humiliated; I will defend myself." Hearing how firm her voice was, her mother changed the conversation.

As for Antoine, from his youth he had imbibed Jesuit principles, and his parents were narrow-minded, with old-fashioned views of woman and her position.

Antoine and Natasha had been good comrades before their marriage, and Natasha naturally expected that this comradeship would continue after, but Antoine thought differently. He had been taught to consider a husband as the sole source of authority and the master of his wife, and he acted accordingly.

Before they had been a week married, he interrupted

Natasha when she was talking to him, and said, " You will have to change many of your views on important matters, and some of your habits." His voice had a tone of command, and Natasha was bewildered.

" What is this new tone you are taking to me? " she asked. " I can make any sacrifice for those I love, work for them, and do anything they wish; but there is no one in the world, Antoine, for whom I will give my moral freedom. Although your wife, I feel free. We have been comrades, and we must remain comrades: I insist on that."

" You know nothing of life," he said coolly, " and you seem to be quite ignorant of a wife's duties to her husband. You will have to learn."

" Is this your promised way of teaching me to love you? " she asked. And without waiting for his answer, for she felt much too miserable, she went out and walked for miles.

Had she been drawn to her husband she might perhaps have found a way of changing his views enough to make their common life happy, or at least bearable, but as things were, the gulf between them widened from day to day.

Antoine was always imperious, and tried to make her think and feel as he wished. She soon realised that the burden she had undertaken was intolerable. Sometimes, between pity for him and revolt against him, she succumbed entirely. Then again she summoned all her strength and resolved to establish a new and better relation between them, but he would ruin everything by showing what strangers they were.

A woman of different character, less candid and more pliable, might have managed to bear injustice in silence and, by apparently yielding, to have got round him in the end, but this was impossible for Natasha.

Scenes between them became more and more frequent. Several months of married life had reduced Natasha to a mere shadow. She wrote every week to Pokròvskoe, but never said a word of her sufferings.

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The neighbourhood was very lonely. There was no village near, and Antoine and Natasha had no visitors to break the monotony of their unhappy days.

The only person who came near them was the foreman at the sugar factory: he was short, stout, and unintellectual. He had a good digestion, and was always amiable: he was fond of music and liked to hear Natasha play. As he had no wife or family, he often came to see them; he would take the most comfortable chair in the room and ask for pathetic music—music that would make him cry.

Natasha liked his coming, partly because it was impossible to quarrel in the presence of a third person, and also because he was kind to Antoine and used to help him a great deal in his difficult task of learning Russian.

It was not possible to talk much, however, for Leòntieff knew very little French, and Antoine only spoke the most hesitating Russian. If Leòntieff and Natasha began to talk in Russian, Antoine's face would darken at once, for he was very jealous; then Natasha would take to her music and play them piece after piece.

Months passed. Antoine did not like the "Russian bear," as he called Leòntieff; he criticised and ridiculed him, but still put up with him because his visits made a break in the deadly monotony. Day by day the husband and wife seemed to grow further apart. Before their marriage they had had one strong interest in common—their science—but now they could neither of them pursue it. Antoine passed his time in rough uninteresting work in the factory, and Natasha was busied with the equally uncongenial duties of her house; they had neither of them leisure for mental culture, and in every other respect they jarred hopelessly.

Antoine had to bear a great many deprivations, and was no less unhappy than Natasha. He had been accustomed to life in Paris and Vienna, to cafés, theatres, libraries; he found himself shut up with uninteresting work, and his ignorance of the language kept him in almost complete isolation; he could not even understand his workmen. He was unable to bear misfortune as patiently as Natasha, and sometimes went into the wildest rages.

One Saturday morning, some eight months after their marriage, Antoine took his gun and went out shooting, for Saturday was a half holiday. He was absent all day, not returning till evening. When Natasha saw him she was shocked and startled; his face was livid, even his lips were pale, his eyes were half-closed, and his features horribly distorted. Natasha imagined he was suffering from a liver attack—he often had them—and she thought at first that it was nothing more, but a moment later she saw that he was furiously angry.

She sprang to her feet, and asked, "What is it, Antoine?"

"How did you *dare*, how did you *dare*, to have Leòntieff here when you were alone, yesterday? You got rid of me by telling me that a walk would do me good, but it was all a trick to be alone with him. I met the brute in the wood, and he told me he had been here alone with you: he boasted that you had played all his favourite pieces, and that he had enjoyed it so very much. No Frenchwoman would dare to behave in that way; no Frenchwoman would disgrace her husband so. But remember this! If Leòntieff puts his foot across this threshold again I will shoot him like a dog! So you see this?" He drew a pistol from his pocket and showed it to her. "This is my best friend. I am miserable, God alone knows how miserable. It is all your fault! I came to this wretched country because of you! I gave up all my friends for your sake, and you don't love me, you never have loved me, and you never will love me. But this," showing the pistol again, "will be the end—both for me and Leòntieff."

"Antoine! For God's sake," cried Natasha, "how can you be jealous of Leòntieff? He is no more to me than that chair," and she pointed with her hand.

His eyes were bloodshot and his face furious; he turned his back on her and rushed to his room without a word, then shut his door and locked it.

Natasha followed him to the door and stood by it, trembling all over: she was in a frenzy lest he should take his own life. She was saying to herself in Russian, "Something terrible will happen. Something dreadful

must happen." She entreated and implored him, begging him to be good to her, to listen to her and believe in her, but he did not make a sound. She spent nearly an hour at the door, and he at last came out, quiet and crushed, the picture of misery.

She was expecting her child in a few months; the strain was too much for her, and she broke down in a nervous fever. In a day or two it became evident that she was seriously ill, and Antoine was alarmed and sent for Tanya, who came at once.

It was the first time she had seen her sister since her marriage, for she had purposely left the young couple to themselves, and she was appalled at the change in Natasha. She saw that Natasha's fever increased whenever her husband approached and judged it best to take her away, so she wrote to her mother telling her that Natasha ought to have better doctors than could be found in that wretched place; she would bring her home.

Tanya was almost as sorry for Antoine as for her sister; she managed to soothe him, and won so much influence over him that he consented to her taking Natasha away for the child's birth. As soon as she was well enough to travel Tanya took her to her old home. Her people were all shocked to see how much she had changed; as for Seraphìma Petròvna, to see her darling in her present condition of body and soul was a real trial, and she reproached herself bitterly for having given her consent to Natasha's marriage with Antoine.

Natasha was indeed on the verge of insanity, for she

had hallucinations and saw and heard imaginary things.

Seraphìma Petròvna with her sensitive nature needed no words of explanation; she read the sad story of her daughter's married life upon her face. Mother and sister did their utmost to nurse her back into health, and to some extent succeeded. Tanya had promised Antoine that she would send for him in time for the birth of his child, and she kept her word. He arrived at Pokròvskoe, and soon after his son was born, but he could take no joy in the event, and the meeting with Natasha was painful to them both. The mere sight of him disturbed her so fearfully that the doctor forbade him to see her again, and he left without doing so.

From the first moment Natasha dearly loved her child, but she felt it impossible to take him to her miserable home; had she alone been concerned she might have nerved herself to face it, but she could not bear to expose the child to any possible danger, and she felt she needed all her strength for him. Tanya began a correspondence with Antoine and told him that Natasha wanted a divorce. He protested most bitterly, entreated and pleaded in every way, but the whole family were united; they begged him for his own sake, for the sake of Natasha and the child, to allow proceedings to be instituted; he agreed at length, and after a long time had elapsed the suit was granted.

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On the Pokròvskoe estate there was a cottage on the high road with a thatched roof and two huge storks' nests on the roof; it was small, but had a pretty garden.

Natasha asked her father's permission to live there with her boy, for her health was still so broken that she did not like being as much with other people as she would have to be in the big house. He agreed and let her have the cottage. Natasha saw hardly any one save the members of her own family and her old friend Milyùtine, who was teaching in an agricultural college two miles away.

A year passed before Natasha was anything like herself, but her child was strong and beautiful and gradually won her back to life. She determined to spend her future partly in her maternal duties and partly in teaching the village children as she had done before.

One by one she resumed the tasks of her maiden life, the school, the evening classes, the village library. She continued for several years to write to Antoine and told him about the child. Then he ceased writing and she gradually lost sight of him; rumours reached her that he had married a Frenchwoman—a widow—but she made no attempt to find out whether it was true. She hoped that he had found happiness.

CHAPTER XX

YEARS passed and took with them first Natasha's father, and a few months later her mother.

On one of his business journeys to St. Petersburg, Lev. Baltazàrovitch was taken ill with cholera, which was raging at that time in the Russian capital, and he passed away after a few days' illness. His death was a terrible blow to his wife. Seraphìma Petròvna bore it heroically, but it broke her heart and her health failed. Two months later she caught a severe cold at a Lent service in the old Pokròvskoe church; pneumonia developed and she succumbed after a few weeks' illness, surrounded by the loving care of her devoted children. It was a terrible loss for Natasha, and she plunged into her maternal duties and her work for the peasants of Pokròvskoe with redoubled energy. She still lived in the same cottage on the high road.

It was a dreary evening late in November. The only sound that broke the stillness was the rain beating against the window panes in Natasha's study. She sat alone at her desk bending over a large pile of exercise books which belonged to her evening pupils; a low lamp with a green shade stood before her and threw a dim light on her face. Now, as always when at work, she was deeply absorbed in what she was doing. Though it was not quite ten, the few inmates of Natasha's house were already asleep.

Nikita (her eight-year-old son) slept in the adjoining room; Stepanida, Natasha's young cook, in a room near the kitchen, and the pet cat, Mashka, was comfortably curled up on her lap.

But Natasha did not realise Mashka's presence. The contents of the copy books interested her very much; she had asked her pupils to write a composition in the form of a letter, addressed to her, describing any day which they had greatly enjoyed. She had Philip the shepherd boy's book in her hand, and was reading how he had enjoyed the story of *Robinson Crusoe* while he lay on the grass with his sheep around him and the beautiful blue sky above.

Suddenly she was startled by the sound of footsteps outside, close to the window, and then the creaking of the door, which had been left open as usual, for Natasha liked to go out and have a glimpse of the sky before she went to bed, and after that she always shut the door herself.

She did not expect any one so late; she got up and went through a narrow corridor to the hall, which was lit by a small photogene lamp, and saw Milyùtine.

His long coat was wet through, and he stood in the door holding a large parcel.

The events of the last years—Natasha's marriage to Neveu, the sufferings she had experienced during her married life, and the effect of all this on her health—had powerfully impressed Milyùtine, and proved a source of endless sorrow.

These trials had left their mark upon him: although he was still young and strong, he had visibly aged.

" You must excuse my late visit," he said. " It is on important business."

" Come in! Put the parcel on the table and take your wet coat off," said Natasha kindly.

Milyùtine obeyed, but, having freed himself from his coat, he took his parcel and followed Natasha into the study. Then, as he sat down, he laid the parcel at his feet.

" Well! What is the matter? " she asked, looking at him sympathetically and trying to understand before she was told.

" We were informed by friends only to-night that the police are going to search our college to-morrow; we were not prepared for that and have something compromising which must not fall into their hands. We had very little time and I thought of you. Will you let me bury this in your garden? It is a small printing press and a box full of our weekly journal. I had intended to tell you we had started a paper for circulation among our present and past students. We write just what we think and feel about this wretched government of ours, and try to find means for saving Russia. But you know we are not allowed to possess a printing press, and if one of the papers fell into the hands of the police it would ruin many of us."

" Why bury it in the garden? " Natasha asked. " Leave the parcel here on the table for to-night and to-morrow I will find a safer place."

" Do not delay! Let me hide it properly at once."

" Nonsense! The police won't come to my house. I have nothing to do with politics. I have never been

compromised, and they won't dream of searching the house of a member of the Orloff family—my brother is too influential. Go in peace and leave the parcel to me. I hope that no trouble awaits your college to-morrow. How did you come?"

"On foot, and I must hurry back. The principal does not know anything and he must not miss me. How grateful I am to you, dear Natàlya Lvòvna, for helping me in a difficult moment."

After shaking Natasha's hand and repeating his thanks he left the house and disappeared in the darkness.

Natasha assured herself that her visitor had wakened neither Nikita nor Stepanida, but she did not feel inclined for further work; she decided that she would leave it till the following morning, and began to arrange her books and papers; then she opened the outer door. The rain had nearly ceased, but the sky was plunged in perfect darkness. She fastened the door carefully and retired to her room.

At six the next morning she was up discharging her duties. She was a careful housekeeper; she helped the cook and she taught her child. At ten o'clock, as she was sitting with Nikita teaching him arithmetic, she was startled by the approach of a carriage. An open droshky entered the gate: it was occupied by two men—one the public prosecutor, and the other a colonel of gendarmes. She had no time to recover from her astonishment before they were in the room.

"I am sorry to intrude on you in this fashion," said the colonel. "But I have been ordered to perform a most unpleasant duty. I knew your father and mother

well, and obey my orders with the greatest reluctance. A letter in your handwriting was found during a search in Kieff, a search in the house of some one badly compromised. This morning we received a telegram ordering us to search your house. I must do my duty, though I am perfectly sure I shall not find anything, and it will even suffice if you say you have nothing of the kind."

Natasha stood for some moments quite speechless and without stirring. She could scarcely believe her ears, everything was too incredible.

At last she recovered her self-command. "You are mistaken! I have something compromising in the house. Here it is," and she pointed to the large parcel in the centre of the table.

"What is it?"

Natasha was silent.

In a moment the colonel was unfastening the parcel, and examining its contents. "It has nothing to do with you, I am sure," he said. "Who has given it to you?"

Natasha stood as if turned to stone, though her eyes followed each movement. Her face was very white, but otherwise she was composed, and there was iron resolution written upon it.

The colonel had to repeat his question.

At length she said without the shadow of hesitation in her voice, "Don't ask me such questions. I cannot answer them."

"But you understand what this means? If you don't name the person you take upon yourself the whole responsibility, and I must take you to prison."

"Then take me to prison if you must." As she spoke

her eyes fell on her child's face. The boy, as if feeling that this visit was bringing trouble to his mother, had left his chair and drawn close to her side; his large dark eyes were fixed on hers with great astonishment and awe; he took her hand in both his. This gave her a slight shock, but did not change her decision.

"I beg you not to conceal the name of the person who gave you this," continued the colonel. "It will not help him, for he will certainly be found sooner or later, but it may ruin you, as it will show you have sympathy with persons involved in politics. Tell it, if not for your own sake, then for that of your child."

"I cannot be dishonourable, even for my child," said Natasha, though she spoke with difficulty.

"Get ready, then."

It was the prosecutor and not the colonel who spoke now, and his voice had a tone of command; but Natasha met his eyes with such dignity that he felt he had no ordinary woman before him. He was used to similar duties, but he felt this case exceptional, and was uneasy in his mind as he paced to and fro.

A few minutes later Natasha re-appeared, leading Nikita by the hand, both of them ready for the journey.

"I must take my boy with me. I have no one with whom I can leave him," she explained.

The colonel bowed his consent. The carriage left the yard, to the great astonishment of Stepanida, who watched it open-mouthed. It rolled along the muddy road towards town. Squeezed in one corner sat Natasha, in the other the colonel, with Nikita between them; on the small seat opposite was the prosecutor. The parcel

containing the printing press and the papers lay at their feet. In perfect silence Natasha's eyes lingered on the dear scenes she was leaving; they passed the bridge shaded by the drooping willows, the old house, the church standing on the hill, the churchyard at some distance, until they were all gone. She was holding the boy by the hand and did not speak during the journey of several miles. The child had first looked eagerly around, but soon fell asleep. Natasha could now give full freedom to her thoughts, and they were very restless, carrying her one moment back to her childhood, the next forward into the unknown future. She had to make an effort to fix them on one point. Sometimes it seemed as if what had happened had nothing to do with her, that she had merely witnessed it as a spectator and was going to town to see her own people, but the sight of the two strangers near her brought her back to reality; the blood rushed to her cheeks. Then she suddenly thought of Stepanida as she had seen her standing at the door in helpless amazement.

"What will she do?" wondered Natasha. "In my hurry and excitement I forgot to give her any instructions. And the village children who will come for their books this afternoon? And the evening pupils to-night, some from a long distance, coming to hear that I am gone? And the lecture I so carefully prepared for next Sunday? Shall I ever be able to take up again all this work I love and have given my strength to for so many years?"

She looked at her sleeping child who lay pressed to her side, and the warning words of the colonel recurred

to her. She realised that to have any intercourse with political suspects, even to pity them, was a crime in Russia.

The thought that her child might have to suffer for what she was doing gave her a terrible pang, and she realised fully the sacrifice she was making. But how could she have done otherwise? It was a matter of honour.

She thought of Milyùtine, and wondered what the poor fellow would feel when he knew what had happened. "And my own dear people! How horrified they will be. And all this change for the sake of one letter." She wondered how her friend could have forgotten her promise to destroy every letter immediately after perusal. She had perhaps forgotten only once, and with what consequences!

The carriage rolled on. The fields on both sides looked bare and monotonous, and there were long stretches of country without one green spot. Most of the song birds had gone to the south; only the cawing of crows and the chirping of sparrows broke the silence of the vast plain. It was not a market day and the vehicles on the road were but few; several Pokròvskoe peasants, returning from town in their carts drawn by grey oxen, met the carriage, recognised Natasha, and took off their caps, but she did not return their greetings, she did not even see them, she was so absorbed in her thoughts; her head leaned on her hand, her eyes were cast down, and she sat as still as if asleep.

From this musing she was suddenly roused by the sound of the wheels rolling on a stone pavement, showing

they had left the soft country roads and were already in town; she looked up and saw a large building painted yellow, which she knew well—it was the infirmary, and they were entering the town by the wide Quai Avenue descending to the harbour.

A steamer from Odessa had just arrived, the smoke was still escaping from the funnel, and a number of vehicles carrying travellers and their luggage filed up the avenue.

This lively picture filled Natasha with dismay, and the more so when some of the carriages met hers and their occupants gave her inquisitive glances and looked curiously at her companions. She understood for the first time that her position in the world had changed, that she was already a prisoner, a person to be pitied, and a bitter feeling of revolt and disgust made her heart heavy. But not by a sigh or a single sound would she betray her emotions; she had decided to be brave and she would be. She sat holding her head high, her hands pressed together under a parcel which lay on her lap.

The carriage had nearly reached the end of the avenue when it turned up the street which Natasha knew led to the prison; another turn and the huge grey building loomed before them with its many turrets, its small iron-barred windows, its high wall. Natasha knew this building well. How often had she accompanied her nurse, bringing a large basket of eggs and cakes and oranges for the prisoners. The nurse would enter the gate, but leave her outside where she could see the prison only from a distance. She had often looked

sympathetically to the tiny windows and tried to understand what sorrows were concealed behind them. How incredible that she was going to live there herself! Her heart beat violently, she watched everything keenly, saw the colonel raise his hand to salute an old officer who passed in a carriage, saw two men hurriedly traversing the prison square without even giving a glance to her, and saw the sentry with his gun marching to and fro. She heard the prosecutor's voice saying to her, " Waken the child! " and she had already laid her hand on Nikita's shoulder when suddenly she saw a large landau, drawn by four beautiful horses, speeding towards the prison from a street on the opposite side of the square; she looked and could hardly believe her eyes. How well she knew the landau and the horses, the important looking coachman with his grey waving beard, and, above all, how well she knew her brother's face!

At the sight of that beloved face Natasha could hardly restrain her tears.

He dismounted hurriedly from the carriage, and she saw that he was waiting for them at the prison gate. His face with its quiet composure had never seemed so beautiful to her.

As Natasha's droshky stopped he approached, made a sign to her to remain in her place, then addressing the colonel, whom he knew well, said he was informed of everything and would like a few words with him privately. They withdrew, and, after a short interview, George returned and took his nephew in his arms, telling his sister to follow him into his carriage.

But Natasha looked at him uncomprehendingly. "I take you on bail," George exclaimed. "Please be quick!" But she did not understand what he meant and sat still.

"Trust me, I will explain everything by and by," George said. The long strain she had imposed on herself began to give way; it required a great effort to do what she was told and she obeyed mechanically.

George returned the colonel's salute and the landau went off.

"How could you set me free?" asked Natasha when she had recovered a little.

"I paid a sum of money for you and now you are my prisoner," said George, smiling good-humouredly.

"And neither Milyùtine nor any one else will have to suffer for me?"

"No! Certainly not! Don't worry, but just have a good rest."

"How did you know what had happened?"

"Stepanida ran to my agent and told him you had left the house with two men from the police, and he sent a messenger on horseback. You know how Hantchar can gallop. He brought me the message in less than half-an-hour, and I understood at once what had happened. Then Milyùtine ran up in wild excitement, hatless and breathless, and as miserable as a man could be; he had heard of your arrest and he told me all that had happened the evening before, and then rushed off saying, 'I will explain everything to the police!'"

"Poor dear Milyùtine! What will become of him," said Natasha, her eyes wet with tears.

"The fact that he comes forward of his own accord will be in his favour."

"Could you not do something for him, darling George, our rescuing angel?" and Natasha took her brother's hand.

"I am afraid I can't do much. We mustn't speak of that at present." He turned his attention to the child, and began to play with him, telling him funny stories till the carriage reached home.

CHAPTER XXI

After the death of Orloff and his wife the Pokròvskoe home was broken up and could never be again what it used to be. The large estate passed to the three brothers, but Nicolas was constantly travelling abroad, visiting picture galleries or living in the south. He was quite absorbed in his profession; he came only once a year to Odessa for the purpose of bringing his works to the South Russia Exhibition.

Urik was studying at a technical college at St. Petersburg. Not wishing to let him live alone in the capital, Tanya went to St. Petersburg and kept house there for him. George became the real head of the house and manager of the large estate. His studies in natural science proved useful to him, and he took the management into his hands with enthusiasm and intelligence.

George Orloff's town house was built by his father; it stood in the best part of the town and was one of the finest buildings of Nikolàeff, equipped with all kinds of modern improvements and conveniences.

On the morning following the day which brought so much trouble to Natasha, George was having his breakfast with his young wife Katerina Ivànovna. The dining-room on the ground floor was spacious. The beautiful rooms were freshly decorated for the occasion of the marriage of the young couple, which had taken place only a few months ago. The room was flooded

with glorious sunshine, but the young face of Katerina did not reflect it. She sat opposite to her husband and was pressing her slender jewelled fingers to her temples without touching her breakfast.

"What is the matter, Katya?" asked George, although he really needed no explanation: he guessed the reason.

"I have not slept one hour the whole night," said Katerina lifting her eyes to her husband's face with the sour plaintive look of a victim. "I really begin to think that Natasha has made up her mind to give trouble after trouble to her own family, and I am afraid there will be no end to it. First, the *mésalliance* with Neveu, then the divorce, now that terrible arrest—scandal after scandal. You think the world of your sister Natasha, but I think she brings only disgrace to us all."

"Katya!" exclaimed George reproachfully, "you don't understand Natasha; you judge like a child."

"I wish you showed me half the consideration you do to Natasha! Everything she does you consider right. I can't see things with your eyes. I find that she often forgets her first duties. Now this story with Milyùtine. What is a Milyùtine, a peasant, to a woman of her class? What is that friendship with him for? Why does she choose friends among that class of people? It cannot bring anything but trouble! And if she stupidly enough took the parcel with those dreadful papers to her house, why did she not tell the truth, that they belonged to Milyùtine? Why conceal and bring all this disgrace upon us? She is eccentric, your sister, and I cannot

but repeat that I do not believe in doing good to strangers and doing harm to your own family."

"Katya, she is our guest—no, she is our prisoner I am sorry to say. She is in a wretched position; she deserves pity and consideration. I had expected something quite different from you. I am disappointed. The general's daughter speaks in you and not my darling!"

Next moment Katerina Ivànovna was on her husband's knee; she pressed her arms round his neck and kissed his face.

"Now don't be angry." She looked in his eyes and then kissed the end of his nose and tickled him behind his ears. She was small and soft and graceful, and had much in her that resembled a kitten. George smiled; he loved his little jewelled doll with her pretty ways of a spoiled child. He adored her rosy lips and abundant curly hair that fell now upon his breast in great disorder. He smoothed the hair and said with a deep sigh—

"You could not have said all that, Kàtinka, if you had seen Natasha as I saw her yesterday, with Nikita at her side, her beautiful eyes so sad, and such a strain upon her face and in all her attitude; and still so much dignity and pride in all her figure as she sat with these two strangers when the carriage was approaching the prison gate. If I live to be a hundred I shall never forget that sight; she was the picture of dignified misery. I love my sister, Katya, and beg you to try to love her a little."

Katerina Ivànovna lifted her head from his bosom, and putting her pretty hands on her husband's shoulders

she exclaimed, " Now you see that is what I said; she makes you feel miserable. It is our first year together; we could have been so endlessly happy but for Natasha. You see, Tanya is quite different; she is a dear, and she is a lady, she is womanly too; but Natasha—no, I won't say anything more. Don't be angry, darling," she passed the palm of her hand over George's forehead; " I don't want to see wrinkles on your beautiful forehead. I have made up my mind, and I won't criticise Natasha."

She looked in his eyes with a determined glance, and accompanying each word with a clap of her tiny hand upon her husband's large one, she said, " That was our last unpleasant talk about your sister. I will try my best to understand her, and that for your sake, because you are the dearest of the dears and we will be happy! happy! happy! "

George gave her a tender kiss and she dismounted from her throne, as she called George's knee, and began her breakfast with an earnest expression on her fresh youthful face.

George met Katerina for the first time at a ball given by the district nobility in Nikolàeff. They were both very good dancers and passionately fond of it. In the first waltz with Katerina Ivànovna, George was fascinated by her grace, vivacity, and youthfulness, and would dance with no one else the whole evening. They danced together till morning.

Katerina fell in love with him almost at first sight and soon conquered his heart.

After a brief engagement they were married at the old Pokròvskoe Church by Father Peter, and the ceremony

was followed by a ball so magnificent that the entire neighbourhood talked of it for months. They settled on the Pokròvskoe estate, though they spent the winter months in their town house.

Katerina was gentle and kind by nature, but she had one weak point—an inordinate pride in her aristocratic descent. She liked to see her letters addressed, "To her excellency Katerina Ivànovna Orlòva," although she had really lost the right to this title since her marriage, for George was only a simple noble. She had received a somewhat primitive education at home, and her views were narrow. It was only natural that she found Natasha uncongenial and eccentric. And although she never said anything of the kind before Natasha, a sensitive nature like Natasha's could not help feeling it.

A dreary life full of vexations and wretched experiences began for Natasha. Neither the large sum of money paid by George as bail, nor Milyùtine's candid confession proving her innocence, nor the fact that she had had nothing to do with political agitation, not all these put together could restore her to her freedom and her previous position in the eyes of the government. Her name was added to the list of suspects; she was watched by spies of the class who are always eager to distinguish themselves by incriminating others. With unmitigated disgust she found that her correspondence was opened and read before she received it: the envelopes arrived either opened or unskilfully fastened. When she walked in the streets of the town she was always aware of strangers following and dogging her footsteps. No less trying were the inquisitive glances of passers-by, who all

seemed to understand the situation. Some of her own acquaintances did not care to recognise her. But all this was as nothing compared to the misery of being continually summoned to the gendarmerie as a witness against Milyùtine. This was a real torture. Innumerable malicious questions were addressed to her in the hope of getting something that would incriminate either him or others, and she pondered every word, dreading lest she might implicate any one. Outrage and indignation filled her heart, but she controlled herself and was always polite in manner.

During these visits to the gendarmerie she realised the true attitude of the officials of the Russian police.

"If a woman in my position has to suffer these indignities," she thought, "what must it be for those who are poor and unknown?"

After these visits Natasha returned to her brother's house perfectly crushed, and so deeply depressed that she could not bear to see any one, and locked herself in her own room. She had not even the comfort of her dear Tanya because she was away.

Milyùtine was kept in prison and only removed to confront Natasha and other people who were compromised. At length after several months the trial took place. Milyùtine, another teacher in the college, and several students concerned with the printing press were sentenced to terms of imprisonment varying from one to three years. Natasha was declared "not guilty," but at the same time compromised by the sympathy she had shown. She was allowed to leave her brother's house, but was not to reside in the capital, and was still

to remain under police surveillance. Under the circumstances, it was impossible to resume her work with the peasants, and she was made in many ways to feel her invidious position.

It was at that time Alexander III. died, being succeeded by Nikolas II. As was always the case, many pardons were given, and her brother took advantage of the occasion to write on her behalf to the czar. He said that Natasha had never really been involved in politics, that all her work had been among the peasants, and asked that her legal position might be restored. The request was granted and once again she was free.

Natasha's many troubles had had a serious effect on the nervous temperament of her child. She thought it would be better on his account to leave the place where so much inquisitive attention had been excited, and go away somewhere where she could give him a good education and find a better climate.

She settled in the south of France, sent her boy to a good school, and lived very quietly, devoting herself entirely to him.

CHAPTER XXII

It was on a cold dark evening in February 1905, after a lapse of ten years, that a traveller, wrapped in a heavy fur coat, sat in a corner of a sledge which was drawn by a troika—three horses abreast; a bell fastened to a wooden arch above the middle horse rang merrily and preluded the approach of the sledge.

After turning from the high road into the village street the sledge moved more slowly, which roused the traveller from his half slumber, and he tried to observe the place he was passing, but it was dark and he could not see much.

"Is't not Pokròvskoe?" he asked.

"Yes, barin, it is," was the reply.

The traveller leaned out of the carriage, looking eagerly to the right and left to discern the familiar scenes. When the village ended and the road widened he noticed a large building surrounded by trees, which stood on the bank of the river. As the sledge was approaching the bridge the traveller leaned out more eagerly still.

"Iamstchik (driver), I see a light at one of the windows. Is that house inhabited? It used not to be in the winter. Do you know who lives there?"

The driver reined in his horses and, turning round, gave the typical answer of a Russian peasant, "We cannot know."

" Turn to the house and stop at the gate."

The driver willingly obeyed and the sledge bell stopped ringing. The gate was shut. The gentleman dismounted and entered the yard by a side gate. Attracted by the noise, two dogs bounded out, barking fiercely. After that a woman's figure appeared at the window holding a lighted candle, and a minute later the same figure, enveloped from head to foot in a thick shawl, came out of the door accompanied by a white setter.

" Who is there? " she called.

" Is there no one to meet a traveller? "

" Pasha! Pasha! "

The traveller could scarcely believe his ears.

" Natàlya Lvòvna," he exclaimed, approaching her with outstretched hand.

" Milyùtine! How wonderful! Where have you come from? Come in, into the warm room! Is your carriage outside? What a time since I saw you! "

They were already in Natasha's room, and Milyùtine, in his joy and astonishment, could find no words to reply. Natasha helped him out of his heavy coat, which was thrown on a chair, and they shook hands again.

" But we must not forget the driver and the horses! Can you stay over night here? "

" Have you room? "

" Certainly! "

Natasha was in the hall immediately. She ran to the bell, seized the cord, and rang repeatedly, her face beaming; no one who had seen her movements, so graceful and light as they were, or her bright expression could

have guessed her age, which was nearly thirty-nine. Pasha was soon in the hall and her face seemed to say, "I have been fast asleep and I don't quite understand all this!"

"Pasha! Wake up! We have a guest. Milyùtine has come. He is half-frozen. Be quick with the samovar. See that it boils properly, and serve tea in my room; it is too cold in the dining-room. Egor must take the driver into the kitchen and give him a glass of vodka."

She went on giving hasty directions.

Meanwhile Milyùtine was sitting with wide open eyes which travelled from the walls to the window and the ceiling; he was not quite sure whether it was all reality or a dream.

The room—the old nursery—was quite familiar to him. An excellent portrait of his dear teacher, Tenkòvsky, hung on the wall above Natasha's desk; near it was his own portrait, also framed, and those of other intimate friends.

The blood rushed to his heart, and as Natasha returned he received her with a radiant smile.

"So we have met again, Natàlya Lvòvna! Do you know how many years since the last time?"

"Ten," answered Natasha, taking a seat opposite to him, "and for a whole year we have had no news of you, Milyùtine; it was just as if you had dropped in the water."

"Yes, the simile is very good! It was really like that. I was imprisoned again, this time by administrative order without trial. But we won't speak of that

now, I am so happy here," and he glanced round the room again.

" The rumours we heard were true then? " said Natasha, in her grave deep voice. " George took every pains to find out where you were. He wrote to several friends in Moscow, for we knew you had gone there after you had been set free, but no one knew anything definite."

" Where is your boy, and where are Tatyana Lvòvna and the rest? "

" Nikita? Oh, you would not recognise him! He is quite a big fellow now, and so clever and handsome. Such a good son to me. We are great friends. You smile. You think I am exaggerating, like all mothers, but I assure you I am not."

" I do not think anything of the kind. I only smile because I am glad to see you again."

" I taught him myself from childhood, and now he is in an excellent agricultural college near Marseilles. He is one of the best students there. I am really proud of him."

" I am glad to hear it. I like your boy. He is strikingly like you, in character, in nature, even in manners. And now tell me of Tatyana Lvòvna. We used to write to each other in former years and her letters were often a great help to me. Is she married? "

" No; she is one of those people who live in a world of their own, and who have an inner life so full and so deep they can be happy without marriage. I never met any one like Tanya. She is kindness itself, and wherever she goes she makes friends and fascinates people. Nikita worships his aunt."

"You are right! I too have met no one like her. Even the thought of her makes one feel better. What is she doing abroad now? Where is she?"

"She has travelled a great deal. She is in Canada at present. She is very much interested in different religious sects. I hope she will some day write her experiences and her thoughts on religion."

"How is it that all your dearest are far away and you are here alone?"

"My brother has given me the use of this house for the winter. I wish to pass my examinations in medicine. I have studied abroad, but am not quite ready yet. Where could one work better than in such perfect loneliness and quiet? I have hardly spoken a word for a week, and how I do enjoy your unexpected visit!"

Milyùtine's astonishment grew as she proceeded.

"No one to speak to? Is no one staying in the house then?" he asked.

"No one except this devoted friend," and she patted the beautiful white setter, who had laid his head on her lap as if listening to the conversation.

"Not even a servant?"

"No; Pasha is afraid of a house with so many empty rooms, and I should not like to force her to stay. She lives with her mother in the village, and the cook lives with her own family in the kitchen, which is some distance away."

"Natàlya Lvòvna all over!" exclaimed Milyùtine warmly. "How free! How considerate! How kind! Unchanged in appearance too! Except for a few lines

you look just the same as ever. Not one silver hair yet!"

"Quite a number of silver hairs if you look by day, and as for the lines, I should not like to part with them; they are signs that I have lived and thought and suffered!"

Pasha entered, carrying a small brass samovar with both hands; it was boiling and spreading warmth and comfort around.

Natasha busied herself preparing the tea. The boiling samovar on the round table with its white cloth, the soft light of the lamps under their milky glass shades, the quietness, the comfortable old-fashioned arm-chairs —all were snugness itself.

Natasha did not need to ask how Milyùtine liked his tea, for she remembered his taste and filled his glass as soon as it grew empty, and placed the cold meat and the bread and butter near him. They took the simple supper amid lively conversation.

Natasha had to give Milyùtine a full account of every member of the family and tell him of their friends.

When Pasha had taken away the supper and retired, the two friends were still together in Natasha's room, and now it was her turn to beg Milyùtine to give an account of himself.

He declined at first, but she insisted, urging him to tell everything.

At last he said, "Perhaps you are right, and it is better for me to tell you all. But it is hard. You have no idea how cruel they have been. You know that

besides science I had another great interest in life—the labour movement. After leaving the south and settling in Moscow, I was able to follow its development much more easily. I naturally became a member of a workman's association, and plunged over head and ears into its affairs. The organisation was not all it might have been, but I did everything I could to help towards unity, and show the men how necessary it was if they wished to improve their position. I came in contact with some splendid fellows through my lectures and evening classes. I took part in arranging a May-Day demonstration; but it would take hours to tell you all I did."

Milyùtine was pacing the room, his eyes fixed on the floor, only at times looking up at Natasha, who sat erect on her chair, leaning forwards, her eyes fixed on him, encouraging him to speak.

"I am listening, I must know all," they seemed to say.

"The workmen were preparing for their great demonstration," Milyùtine continued; "they were to raise their red banners and march through the streets of Moscow singing revolutionary songs and proclaiming the rights of the people. Three of us were sitting together finishing the last lines of our revolutionary appeal, and the nearer we came to the end the greater seemed our enthusiasm and our consciousness of strength. It was perfectly quiet. The lamp was burning low and the spring wind played gently with the folds of the curtains. Suddenly this warm caressing stillness was broken by a horrible shrill whistle, something banged downstairs,

and the next moment there was a clashing of sabres and clinking of spurs and an impatient cowardly knock at our door. We knew who these unwelcome guests were who were taking advantage of the silence of the night to make their invasion. 'Who is there?' we asked, to get time for the destruction of the leaflets. 'A telegram,' was the cowardly answer. 'Well, come in.'

"They came shouting, knocking everything down, pushing each other, and stretching out their wicked hands towards us. Some threw themselves upon us, others on the papers. There were many of them, policemen, gendarmes, dvorniks, and spies; they put their noses everywhere, poking about, tearing the wall-papers down, looking under the beds, searching in the cinders where the ashes of our papers were still smouldering. We felt as if the words so dear to our hearts were being utterly destroyed. At last they grew tired. They had found nothing, but the warm ashes with the crimson lines in them which still rustled in the fire were eloquent against us. Embittered by failure they seized us and, surrounding us with gendarmes, threw us in prison that very night. We knew their cruelty and did not expect any mercy; but how terrible, how awful, was that first night in prison. Only a moment before our minds were soaring so high, we had longed for battle and expected success; now we were weak, sad, and powerless, separated from each other, the heavy prison door bolted behind us.

"Ah! What a mercy that heaven spared you such experiences! Oh, that year in prison! Stone and iron!

Cold, damp stone and merciless iron, and nothing else the whole year long! The morning comes: a pale ray of light creeps between the double iron grating, strikes its beam against the iron table screwed to the wall and against a door covered with iron. It grows dark. The stone arches plunge in blackness and a black shade covers the walls. What time is it? I feel for my watch and then remember that it was taken from me. I must not know the time; I must not even count the hours and the minutes which are left to me until sleep comes with its blessed forgetfulness; my enemies will not let me have that small consolation. Black darkness. It is a welcome guest! The greater the darkness the better. It hides the cold dismalness of this tomb, and deadens the powerless rage of one's heart. A whole year I spent in that stone cell, but I never got used to it. I studied my tomb down to its minutest details. I knew every chink in it, every scratch, every hole in the window. I learnt to put my burning hands on the cold surface of the iron table, but I never was reconciled; I hated everything.

" The clock in the gallery strikes twelve, and a yawn is audible; some one steals to my door, he pushes the grating back, it clashes into its place, and then the footsteps withdraw. I think he is gone, and suddenly a powerless rage seizes me, I must do something or else I shall choke. I must touch the window panes with my burning forehead, I must see the sky so distant from me now. I climb up with difficulty, catching at the iron bars and breaking my nails. Suddenly I hear the clinking of keys: the lock is turned, the door opens,

and on the threshold appears the hateful figure of my gaoler. With a harsh voice he shouts, ' To the dungeon! To the dungeon! '

" ' I in the dungeon! What! Not satisfied yet! ' And I too shout, shout with an inhuman voice which echoes in the walls of my cell.

" ' No! never! Take me by force, carry me! But I will never go myself.' The gaoler stared at me and read something in my face which softened even his hard heart; he murmured between his teeth and disappeared. And I remained alone with my despair, physically exhausted, humiliated, but full of a burning savage rage that I could not subdue. It is in that way that they change men into savage beasts. I have abhorred bloodshed ever since I could think. I have not yet learnt to kill others, but I cannot help rejoicing when I hear that one of our bloodthirsty persecutors has been killed, and the blood of so many innocent sufferers avenged! "

Natasha had been sitting in her chair with her hands clasped together trying to control her growing emotion, but she could no longer restrain it; she rose from her seat and next moment was by Milyùtine's side.

He sat on his chair, his strong figure bent down, his face buried in his hands, he was so wrapped up in the past that he scarcely realised where he was. The touch of Natasha's soft hand on his hair roused him; he lifted his head and saw her dear face close to him and had a sensation as if heaven itself had opened, and a new and glorious light broken into his life. Those wonderful brown eyes! How eloquent they were! With what a

lovely expression they rested on him. They spoke of self-sacrificing love and promised life-long devotion. They held sympathy for his sufferings, admiration for his courage, remorse for not having understood him before. His faithful life-long love had at last its reward.

CHAPTER XXIII

MONTREAL, CANADA, *March* 30, 1905.

DARLING NATASHA,—I read your letter again and again and again, and can hardly believe my eyes. Is it possible that my dearest wish is at last to be fulfilled! I am simply wild with joy. I have upset the water at table d'hôte and astonished everybody; I ran into the landlady on the stairs, and am afraid I shall do many more things equally clumsy, but I feel as if I could dance with joy and long to fly across the ocean to be with you both. Why is father not alive? He always wished so much that you might marry Milyùtine. If you don't see God's finger in that wonderful meeting at Pokròvskoe you are blind, blind, blind! And what a friend Nikita will find in Milyùtine! To judge by your letter, which was a long time in reaching me, you must be married already. How wise of you! There was no time to be lost! You have lost too much already. If there is a man who has deserved Natasha it is Milyùtine. I have never written a poem, but I think I could to-day. Now listen, dearest, I make one most heartfelt entreaty to you both. Leave politics alone. It is the only thing which can ruin your happiness. Use your time and strength to raise the people by education! That is the only thing which can really change the miserable state of Russia. I will soon come home to see you.—With love to you both,

TANYA.

Second Letter.

Convent Bogoroditsk,
May 5, 1905.

Dearest Natasha,—I have at last made up my mind to remain here. Do not be alarmed! It is not as nun, but as a free person. I love the place. My darling father lies buried here, and I visit his grave daily and take fresh flowers. I think there is no other place in the world where I could feel so much at home, so peaceful and quiet. You know how beautiful this place is! I see Pokròvskoe on the other side of the river. All our happy youth is there. This peninsula is the loveliest spot for miles and miles. The people here know how much they owe to my father and are very good to me. The mother superior has given me a tiny house on the bank of the river. It is a new building which has "every modern comfort." The window of my sitting-room looks on the river and there are masses of the most beautiful flowers growing beneath. So far, no storks have made their nest on my roof, but I hope they will soon.

In these quiet peaceful surroundings I shall be able to work. I must put down everything I have thought and experienced concerning the one great question—you know what I mean—that it may be of some use to others. As I am writing to you the vesper bell rings. I have formed my own religion, but I like to go in the church among the people who pray. Many of them knew father. Although in a convent I am still at

liberty and have a carriage at my disposal to take me to town when I wish. I have a comfortable spare room. This will be a room for you and Milyùtine, and I hope you will often be my guests.—Yours for ever,

TANYA.

ODESSA, *June* 16-29, 1905.

DEAREST TANYA,—You have most probably heard about the mutiny of the crew on the warship *Potemkin*. The *Potemkin* has been bombarding Odessa since yesterday. I hasten to let you know that everything in our house is all right, and that notwithstanding the tremendous fire in the harbour and the cannonading in the town, Milyùtine and I do not feel the least desire to take flight, but on the contrary we wish to endure our share of the common disaster.

The quay, the sheds, and the railway station are in flames. The interior of the town is quiet. Guns, Cossacks and their horses, soldiers, sentries, are posted everywhere in the streets.

The heat here is dreadful, the sun—owing to the smoke spread from the burning buildings—has a lurid, ominous aspect. The steamer service has been stopped. This letter will take some time in reaching you.

Don't be anxious about us, darling. We shall not take any active part in the revolution; neither of us could kill, but we will help in every possible way those who suffer in their struggle for freedom.

Milyùtine's love, his wonderful unselfishness, his courage, the ardent sympathy he feels for all those who suffer, his joy when he can render a service to any one

in need of help, all that fills my heart with courage and with hope for the future of Russia. As long as Russia has people so good and brave as he is, we must not despair. Better times will come.

I am glad you are teaching in the school. You are doing your work, we—ours. I will write again soon.—Your loving,

NATASHA.

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